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ABSTRACT

It is now widely recognized that small schools are more productive and effective than larger schools. Yet, public officials and professional educators in many rural areas continue to believe that small schools are inefficient and ineffective, a way of thinking reflected in closed schools, angry residents, and long bus rides for students. About a quarter of U.S. high schools remain small (with fewer than 400 students in grades 9-12). Part research report and part handbook for action, this book discusses the general status of small rural high schools, takes a closer lock at four small high schools that are flourishing despite being located in communities of very modest means, and offers guidance to administrators and policymakers who would like to keep their small high schools but must grapple with numerous problems. Chapter 1-3 examine the literature on small schools with particular relevance to rural areas, discuss strategies for sustaining small rural high schools, and describe the case-study methods. Chapters 4-7 present case studies conducted in 1997-98 in Oneida High School (Oneida, TN); Wahluke High School (Mattawa, WA); Thrasher K-12 School (Booneville, MS); and Fourche Valley School (Briggsville, AR). These chapters consider the character of the schools (how they are different); connect findings to perspectives on rural communities, social capital, and school leadership; and reflect on the importance of articulating rural priorities for rural schools. Chapter 8 compares and contrasts the case-study schools. Chapter 9 presents organizations, Web sites, and readings related to policy, community engagement, rural school facilities, and school and curricular leadership. Chapter authors are Craig B. Howley, Hobart L. Harmon, Diane Dorfman, Calvin W. Jackson, and Patricia Demler Hadden. (Contains 132 references.) (SV)

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SMALL HIGH SCHOOLS THAT FLOURISH:

Rural Context, Case Studies and Resources

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Small High Schools that Flourish: Rural Context, Case Studies, and Resources

edited by
Craig B. Howley and Hobart L. Harmon

AEL, Inc.
Charleston, West Virginia

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Preface

This book is an unusual collaboration and, as a result, it takes an unusual form: part research report, part handbook for action. The editors and participating researchers are informed supporters of small rural schools. In fact, our various separate works represent a longstanding engagement with research about rural education and school size, as well as experience in teaching and administering in such schools and districts.

A carefully reasoned argument exists for supporting small rural high schools, for sustaining them long into the future, and for propagating *more* small schools nationwide as choices for construction and administration arise (please consult the readings suggested in the final chapter for the full width and depth of this argument).

This is not the usual context for educational research, of course. But it is an increasingly more familiar context for it. Astute thinkers are more and more frequently recognizing *commitment* as a starting point for research. Without passion, insight, and devotion, no research project or program is likely to make wise choices, let alone make sense upon completion. David Orr, a biologist who has written very perceptively about rural education and the future of society, puts it this way:

> It is a mistake to assume that commitment precludes the ability to think clearly and to use evidence accurately. To the contrary, commitment motivates intellectual clarity, integrity, and depth. We understand this in other realms quite well. When the chips are down, we do not go to physicians who admit to being neutral about the life and death of their patients.[1]

Neutrality, then, probably does not guarantee objectivity. It can easily become a testament to cowardice. Many years ago, Franz Rosenzweig, a collaborator of the great theologian Martin Buber, observed that

> the single condition imposed upon us by objectivity is that we survey the entire horizon; but we are not obliged to make this survey from any position other than the one in which we are, nor are we obliged to make it from no position at all. Our eyes are, indeed, only our own eyes; yet it would be folly to imagine that we must pluck them out in order to see straight.[2]

For this work, then, we claim objectivity rather than neutrality. We consulted multiple sources of evidence, and we established standards and expectations for our work. We subjected the completed draft to anonymous reviewers and took their reactions into consideration as we revised the manuscript. Also, with the case studies reported here, we never intended our work to rise to the level of definitive representations. We chose "qualitative" methods in order to develop "thick descriptions" from the vantage of community connectedness.

Instead of representativeness, we sought to portray a number of very small rural high schools for two reasons: (1) so that place-connected rural readers could recognize themselves in the literature of school reform and improvement and (2) so that *other readers* might come to a secondhand understanding of rural dilemmas and challenges, as well. Too often in our experience schools considered "excellent" are located in suburban areas. According to some rural writers, these schools follow purposes and pursue goals that are not particularly appropriate for (nor hospitable to) rural life. The result of emulating such schools in rural areas, is often harmful.[3]

The individuals who developed this book add their voices to those who insist on diversity not only as a strength, but as a necessity for survival. Rural lifeways are, unfortunately, seldom considered a necessary part of that diversity, but the rural connection just might be the most critical one, as David Orr explains:

> For the loss of farms as places of instruction and as a source of practical and ecological competence, I know of no good substitute. . . . We do not know whether democracy can long survive without widely dispersed control of rural land and resources, but there are good reasons to think that it cannot.[4]

However readers may variously regard this claim, some thinkers clearly find that the highest purposes and meanings surround the effort to recreate and sustain rural communities.

The first chapter of section I, then, introduces the research context of the study–the literature on small schools, but more particularly, the established meanings of such literature for rural schools. Parallel issues exist within urban education—scale, poverty, community, diversity—but our story is a rural one, not an urban one. Deborah Meier, among

others, has done a remarkable job of telling that urban story, and the case studies presented here are offered in a spirit consistent with Meier's devotion.[5]

Chapter 2 offers counsel—particularly to state policymakers, superintendents, and community leaders—on strategies for sustaining small rural high schools. We have made the unusual choice of placing this chapter at the beginning rather than the end of the book to give it prominence. We also think the content of this chapter provides practical context for the case studies.

Let us explain why the considerations of chapter 2 are so important to include. In rural areas, school size continues to grow.[6] This trend exists despite findings about the various strengths of small schools and the emerging conventional wisdom that no school should enroll more than 600 or 1,000 students.[7] One of the editors has been contacted often by citizens and board members in *rural* communities where proposals have been made to build *elementary schools* to serve up to 2,000 students. In most cases these projects have been funded and will probably be built, despite the opposition of the communities. We are not surprised to hear superintendents attribute such decisions to economic inevitability.

Chapter 2 was written with input from rural superintendents around the nation who helped identify the barriers to small school sustainability and ideas for circumventing those barriers. In summary, chapter 2 provides the context needed for an active response to the concepts presented in chapter 1.

Chapter 3 describes the methods we used in the case studies. This chapter may be less intriguing than the first two, but readers will require this account in order to appreciate both the limitations of the case study reports and the merits of our claims about objectivity.

The four chapters in section II present case studies of small rural high schools in different regions of the United States. Table 1 provides comparative data (1997-1998 school year) about these schools. The schools are

Oneida High School in Oneida, Tennessee
Wahluke High School in Mattawa, Washington
Thrasher K-12 School in Booneville, Mississippi
Fourche Valley School in Briggsville, Arkansas

Table 1

Comparative Data for Study Schools (grades 9-12[1])

School	Teacher FTE	Enrollment	Locale	% minority
Oneida	24.0[2]	340	small town	0.3 %
Wahluke	18.7	263	rural	57.4 %
Thrasher	13.7[3]	155	small town	23.9 %
Fourche Valley	11.7	32	rural	5.7 %

1. All data from *Common Core of Data School Locator, (CCD) School Years 1993-94 through 1997-98*, NCES 2000-370, (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 1998).

2. 1995 teccher FTE; 1997 teacher FTE not reported in source material.

3. 9-12 FTE not reported; estimated from 9-12 enrollment and student/teacher ratio.

We must stress that we do not maintain that these are "the best" rural high school programs in the country. Nonetheless, on our visits we found schools that looked *vigorously* alive, that were reported as *thriving* by a range of local people, and that enjoyed reputations for such vigor. All have been not merely maintained but positively *sustained* by community affection and need. Were they flourishing? We leave that judgment to readers and to the people of these communities. The overall implication of the studies is that these schools are without question *sustainable*, and that improving them is an ongoing project in their communities.

Sustaining small rural high schools better than we do now requires a combination of deeper understanding and wiser action. We created this book, in part, to give our readers, particularly our rural readers, hope that these situations are amenable to action.

By amenable to action, we mean that while all situations are influenced by policy, habits of practice, and leadership, we hope that the influence of people who understand (from both reading and personal experience) the sorts of things good rural schools need to do to flourish will prevail. These decisions vary from community to community, as the stories of these four small rural high schools suggest.

Commonalities do indeed exist, but the same practices often do not flourish similarly in all places. Places are influenced by their individual historical, political, and economic make-ups. According to many observers, one of the greatest illusions of school reform in the past century has been the narrow pursuit of "one-best" solutions to educational dilemmas. According to Larry Cuban, too many educators believe that the challenges they face are "problems" to be solved. Instead, he claims, most of the challenges educators confront are dilemmas that persist and are never solved no matter what "solutions" are imposed. Cuban says that wise action requires us to manage dilemmas and that "solutions" are merely a way of avoiding our responsibilities.[8]

Chapter 8 considers the differences and commonalities of the dilemmas faced by the schools and districts in the case studies. With this understanding, chapter 9 provides tools for action. Since the 1997 publication of *Sustainable Small Schools: A Handbook for Rural Communities,*[9] the companion volume to this book, the World Wide Web has made its way into many American households. With this in mind, we list in this chapter dozens of organizations concerned with policy, small schools, curriculum and leadership at the school level, and community development—categories relevant to themes and issues from the case studies. Key contact information (postal, telephone, and electronic) for most organizations is included. These organizational links provide via the Web thousands of other links relevant to sustaining small rural schools and their communities.

In addition to these resources, the final chapter describes nine books that the editors have found to be extremely helpful in understanding the circumstances of small rural schools and communities. Good writing about rural life and rural schools exists in abundance because American culture is historically rural-focused. While our book selection emphasizes practicality, we do not ignore the "big picture." The works on our list were chosen for their universal appeal. We avoided very academic or pedantic works altogether. For those who want further suggestions, we have included the excellent guide by Haas and Nachtigal, cited often in these chapters.

Finally, we have selected 30 ERIC Digests on topics related to the same categories we used to develop our organizational resources, i.e. small size, curriculum and leadership, community development, and

policy. The Digests, which summarize the literature in education according to their various titles, are available on-line in full-text versions. Each is about 1,500 words in length. We provide information on how to retrieve them.

This book would not have been possible without the generosity of dozens of people in the communities we visited—parents, students, teachers, principals, superintendents, and school board members. We claimed a lot of their time and trust. In all cases we were total strangers, and in all cases we were warmly received. Hospitality and openness are part of the pride these folks take in the places they live.

Chapter 2 is based largely on conversations with nearly two dozen rural superintendents in five states. Timothy Collins, former director of the ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, and Brenda Haas, principal of a small rural high school in Coal Grove, Ohio, (and a doctoral candidate at Ohio University) conducted most of the interviews on which chapter 2 is based. Brenda completed this work under the supervision of Catherine Glascock, assistant professor of educational administration at Ohio University, as part of a research internship. The collaboration of these colleagues, therefore, enabled us to provide a unique policy-oriented context for the case studies.

Many others helped in the development and editorial work, as well. We thank Dan Branham and Robert Childers of AEL for their successive support of this project. Our lives were changing as was the Lab's, but this work persisted because they supported it. Patricia Cahape Hammer brought her insight and good taste to bear throughout the several iterations of the draft, work that has substantially improved the text. Sheila McEntee, Sarah Dewees, Penny Sebok, Carolyn Luzader, and Nancy Balow all helped prepare the manuscript for publication. Finally, the editors owe a special debt of gratitude to Frank Lutz (Texas A&M University) and Doris Redfield (AEL, Inc.), each of whom provided hundreds of suggestions that improved the accessibility and logic of successive drafts.

Notes

1. D. Orr, *Earth in Mind: On Education, Environment, and the Human Prospect* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 1994), 137.

2. F. Rosenzweig, *Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and Thought*, ed. N. Glatzer, (New York: Schocken, 1961), 179.

3. See, for example, A. DeYoung, *The Life and Death of a Rural American High School: Farewell, Little Kanawha* (New York: Garland, 1995); P. Theobald, *Teaching the Commons: Place, Pride, and the Renewal of Community* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1997); and Orr, *Earth in Mind*.

4. Orr, *Earth in Mind*, 176-177.

5. D. Meier, *The Power of Their Ideas: Lessons for America from a Small School in Harlem* (Boston: Beacon, 1995).

6. See, for example, A. DeYoung, C. Howley, and P. Theobald, "Cultural Contradictions of Middle Schooling for Rural Community Survival," *Journal of Research in Rural Education* 11(1): 24-35 (1995).

7. U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley, speaking to the American Institute of Architects in October 1999 (see Appendix A for a partial transcript) remarked that "much of the research we have available to us now suggests that schools should be no larger than 600 students." The Education Commission of the States, on the other hand, sets the upper limit at 1,000 or at least specifies that number as the consensus of recent research (see the footnote to table 1). These views mark a substantial shift in professional opinion from just ten years earlier.

8. See, for example, S. Arons, *A Short Route to Chaos: Conscience, Community, and the Reconstitution of American Schooling* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997); R. Gibboney, *The Stone Trumpet: A Story of Practical School Reform, 1960-1990* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994); J. Spring, *Conflict of Interests: The Politics of American Education*, 3d ed. (Blacklick, OH: McGraw-Hill, 1998); D. Tyack, *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974); and D. Tyack and L. Cuban, *Tinkering Toward Utopia: A Century of Public School Reform* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

9. See C. Howley and J. Eckman, eds., *Sustainable Small Schools: A Handbook for Rural Communities* (Charleston, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, 1997), ERIC Reproduction Service No. ED 402 136. Please consult this earlier work for information about coalition building and related topics. Consult chapter 2 for counsel on keeping small schools open and building new small schools.

CHAPTER 1

The Need

CRAIG B. HOWLEY

Researchers involved in this project visited four rural high schools enrolling 400 or fewer students in grades 9-12. The schools had been nominated by state policymakers, academics, and professional leaders who claimed these schools were *flourishing*. The research was designed to report the vision, worldview, and local initiative evident in these small rural schools and their communities, whatever the details turned out to be.[1] The guiding question asked:

> How is it that rural communities retain, maintain, and sustain small high schools in the face of declining enrollments, increasing financial constraints, increasing demands for accountability, and (in some regions) continuing efforts to create larger schools?

Researchers in this study sought to develop descriptions of *good small high schools* serving *rural* communities of *distinctly modest* means.

In fact, the places visited would be judged impoverished on the basis of the presenting statistics: incomes were modest and, in three communities, adult educational attainment levels were low. These communities, however, exhibited an internal cohesiveness that outweighed the negative impact predicted by the statistics. That is, evident poverty in these places seemed *not* to serve as the impediment to school performance or participation that it so often does elsewhere.

The research methods are described more fully in Chapter 3, but briefly the researchers in this project interviewed a range of constituents, consulted local documents, and developed descriptions of context based principally on evidence, not on preconceptions. The interpretive lens was focused on rural problems and issues, based on the assumption that good education does not look the same everywhere. The editors believe that good education is more rare and more miraculous than educators and policymakers commonly believe. And, while research can and should be a useful source of counsel for wise action, the outcomes of education have multiple causes that interact so vigorously with one another that the path from A (inputs) to B (outcomes) has so far been only dimly grasped. That pathway often seems chaotic, and perhaps chaos theory may one day offer an explanation of educational processes. In the meantime, educators and policymakers are stuck with partial understanding and the absolute imperative to act.

What Size High School Is Best?

The editors produced this book to cultivate greater wisdom about which size school is best in a given place. We are, in fact, convinced that no "one-best" answer, no single "optimal" size exists for the average high school. Six hundred? Ninety? Three hundred? A thousand? Two thousand? It depends on a lot of things, in our experience.

For instance, in a new study of Georgia schools and districts, Robert Bickel and Craig Howley show that the degree of influence that size has on achievement (whether the effect is positive, nil, or negative) depends *not only* on school socioeconomic status, district size, and district socioeconomic status, but also on the *interaction* of these variables.[2] The main finding was that the "best size" for a school is very much dependent on local circumstance. But another finding also became quite clear: smaller schools produce much better results in poorer communities.[3]

Of course, maximizing student achievement in poor communities has to be a goal in order to affect policy changes. In the past, student achievement in these communities was not a strong priority. Today, by contrast, state educational accountability systems require more of *all* schools and districts. States and districts should be using what is now

known about the benefits of small school and district size to improve the academic odds in impoverished rural communities.

The Threat to Small Rural High Schools

Why is this research worth doing and reporting? Keeping small schools open has always been a genuine challenge in rural areas.[4] Small rural schools lead a precarious existence in most places, and small rural *high schools* endure the most exceptional challenges. Often state education agencies, state legislatures, local district leadership (in larger districts), and some education professionals view such schools as stagnant rather than active and foundering rather than succeeding.

This may seem a harsh judgment. Some readers will doubtless think it quite inaccurate. Indeed, recent literature on school size details the substantial benefits of small schools, asserts that many extant schools are too large, and in the rural portion of the discussion, complexly relates the disintegration of rural communities to the loss of rural schools.[5] Rural schools and districts have nonetheless undergone decades of consolidation. This contradiction between current knowledge and practice constitutes a conundrum. Today, at the very least, rural school closures should be regarded as much more questionable than they once were.[6] Esteemed writers like Wendell Berry, David Orr, and Paul Gruchow likely would find this assessment moderate compared to their own views.

The editors and research team members continue to work with public officials and professional educators who believe that rural schools are too small, inefficient, and ineffective. They regard small rural schools as impediments to excellence and efficiency. Creating larger schools (and districts) is, in many areas, the presumed path to excellence and efficiency.[7] Rural communities have seen this way of thinking result in closed schools, angry residents, and long bus rides for many children. These effects are well documented in the research literature.[8]

Professional opinion about small schools is changing, but new views have hardly caught up with the old practices. And, indeed, the issue is not the "good and new" versus the "old and bad." Instead, the issue is the need—the professional imperative—to think through complex issues with insight and sensitivity and to make wise, courageous decisions.

The Need for Small High Schools

In spite of decades of consolidation, many small rural high schools continue to exist throughout the nation. Based on James Conant's influential study, *The American High School Today*, published in 1959, 400 students came to be considered the *minimum* enrollment for a 9-12 school, while 1,000-1,500 students was widely considered to be the *ideal* size. District administrators worked hard to achieve this ideal.

Table 2. Breakout by state and U.S. Census Region of Small (400 or Fewer Students) and Large (More Than 1000 Students) High Schools

U.S. Census Region	State	Percent of High Schools Small	Percent not Small	Number of Small High Schools	Number of Large High Schools	Total Number of 9-12 High Schools in State/Region
East North Central		27.48%	32.50%	585	692	2,129
	IL	40.74%	35.27%	231	200	567
	IN	8.04%	42.86%	18	96	224
	MI	23.42%	32.07%	111	152	474
	OH	16.73%	31.32%	86	161	514
	WI	39.71%	23.71%	139	83	350
East South Central		16.25%	35.16%	110	238	677
	AL	17.28%	32.01%	28	52	162
	KY	17.82%	34.16%	36	69	202
	MS	15.18%	26.79%	17	30	112
	TN	14.43%	43.28%	29	87	201
Mid Atlantic		7.78%	44.28%	85	484	1,093
	NJ	3.91%	49.22%	10	126	256
	NY	10.43%	43.56%	51	213	489
	PA	6.90%	41.67%	24	145	348
Mountain		47.54%	31.94%	387	260	814
	AZ	32.56%	46.51%	56	80	172
	CO	36.61%	43.17%	67	79	183
	ID	45.45%	18.18%	30	12	66
	MT	80.70%	7.02%	138	12	171
	NM	41.67%	39.29%	35	33	84
	NV	17.78%	57.78%	8	26	45
	UT	21.21%	45.45%	7	15	33
	WY	76.67%	5.00%	46	3	60

New England		15.51%	31.96%	83	171	535
	CT	9.92%	38.17%	13	50	131
	MA	6.18%	39.89%	11	71	178
	ME	37.23%	10.64%	35	10	94
	NH	31.58%	21.05%	24	16	76
	RI	0.00%	50.00%	0	17	34
	VT	0.00%	31.82%	0	7	22
Pacific		15.50%	65.58%	190	804	1,226
	AK	45.95%	29.73%	17	11	37
	CA	8.31%	78.01%	65	610	782
	HI	0.00%	91.67%	0	22	24
	OR	32.37%	39.88%	56	69	173
	WA	24.76%	43.81%	52	92	210
South Atlantic		6.61%	60.71%	95	873	1,438
	DC	27.78%	22.22%	5	4	18
	DE	4.55%	68.18%	1	15	22
	FL	6.36%	84.32%	15	199	236
	GA	3.19%	68.53%	8	172	251
	MD	2.58%	76.13%	4	118	155
	NC	3.48%	49.48%	10	142	287
	SC	11.04%	51.30%	17	79	154
	VA	7.83%	56.09%	18	129	230
	WV	20.00%	17.65%	17	15	85
West North Central		55.58%	20.36%	677	248	1,218
	IA	59.41%	15.90%	142	38	239
	KS	68.08%	15.00%	177	39	260
	MN	20.28%	42.66%	29	61	143
	MO	37.13%	26.84%	101	73	272
	ND	69.44%	19.44%	25	7	36
	NE	53.41%	26.14%	47	23	88
	SD	86.67%	3.89%	156	7	180
West South Central		43.45%	31.86%	637	467	1,466
	AR	45.28%	11.32%	24	6	53
	LA	14.88%	46.43%	25	78	168
	OK	76.96%	6.28%	294	24	382
	TX	34.07%	41.60%	294	359	863
Total (Nation)		26.89%	39.99%	2,849	4,237	10,596

Data source: Common Core of Data, 1997-98 School Year, NCES.
Data not included for the Virgin Islands, BIA Schools, American Samoa, Guam, Northern Marinaras, Puerto Rico, Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Palu.

Today many high schools are larger—sometimes much larger, particularly in large cities—than this once ideal size. However, throughout the Great Plains, in the Midwest, and in the Intermountain West, many high schools continue to enroll fewer than 400 students. Table 2 provides a breakout by region of the number and percentage of high schools that enroll 400 or fewer students and those that enroll more than 1,000 students.[9]

The cross-tabulations of table 2 suggests that the norms of school size vary dramatically by region. The regions whose states contain many *small* high schools (more than 40 percent of all 9-12 high schools in the region) are the West North Central region (55 percent), the Mountain region (47 percent), and the West South Central region (43 percent). In fact, about 58 percent of the 2,849 such schools in the nation operate within three regions: the West North Central region (677), the Mountain region (387), and the West South Central region (637). The East North Central Region also includes a large number of small high schools (585).

The fact that a region is largely rural, however, hardly ensures the existence of small high schools. The East South Central region is quite rural, for instance, but just 16 percent of the 9-12 high schools there have 400 or fewer students.

In analyses by state, the variability is even greater than it is by region (see figure 1). While nationally just 27 percent of 9-12 high schools enroll 400 or fewer students, some states' high school systems are composed mostly of such small schools: South Dakota (86.67 percent), Montana (80.70 percent), Oklahoma (77 percent), Wyoming (77 percent), North Dakota (69 percent), and Kansas (68 percent).

For a variety of reasons (to be considered shortly), sustaining these small high schools and helping them to flourish ought to be an important policy objective at both the state and the national level. Indeed, as opportunities arise, America would do well to create smaller high schools in all types of communities—rural, suburban, and urban. This wisdom is becoming more widely accepted as time goes on.[10]

Between the inception (late 1996) of this project and the writing of this book (early 2000), small school size has been championed by prominent Americans, including the Vice President and the Secretary of Education of the United States. Secretary Richard Riley recently did

Figure 1. Percent of all high schools with 400 or fewer students

Data Source: Common Core Data, 1997-98 School Year.

Alaska and Hawaii not to scale of conterminous U.S.

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something dramatic and uncharacteristic of a high-profile government official: he offered implicit praise of rural communities' resistance to school consolidation.[11] For rural education writers and activists, this was an astonishing display of support. It is now evident that people in powerful positions acknowledge that good high schools can be small.

Some who write about good schools believe that really good high schools *must* be small.[12] According to many observers, including Secretary Riley and the prestigious Education Commission of the States, too many young people attend schools that are too large.[13]

Table 2 also provides a reckoning by region of the number and percentage of schools that are larger than the upper limit of 1,000 students suggested as "the consensus of research" by the Education Commission of the States.[14] By contemporary standards of "humanly scaled institutions," many U.S. 9-12 high schools might be judged too large.[15]

The data on small schools in table 2 suggest that in some regions, 9-12 high schools larger than 1,000 students are very common (see also figure 2). In fact, schools this large account for more than 30 percent of all 9-12 high schools in eight of the nine regions and for more than 40 percent of all schools in three of the nine regions (Mid Atlantic, Pacific, and South Atlantic). Table 2 and figure 2 also show that of the 4,237 large high schools (those with enrollments of 1,000 students), over half are found in just three regions: the Pacific region (804), the South Atlantic region (873), and East North Central region (692). The five states with the greatest *proportions* of large 9-12 high schools are Hawaii (92 percent), Florida (84 percent), California (78 percent), Maryland (76 percent), and Georgia (69 percent).

The exact causes of this variation have not been studied, but the causes surely have a great deal to do with the diverging history, politics, and economies of the various states. Nonetheless, district organization is one very likely influence. Where county districts prevail (as they do in the southeast), schools are larger. Where township districts prevail (as in the Midwest), schools are smaller.

Economics is a substantial influence, as well. West Virginia converted practically overnight to countywide districts during the Great Depression of the 1930s, which struck coal country particularly hard. Economic disparities created by the coal economy have, over time and

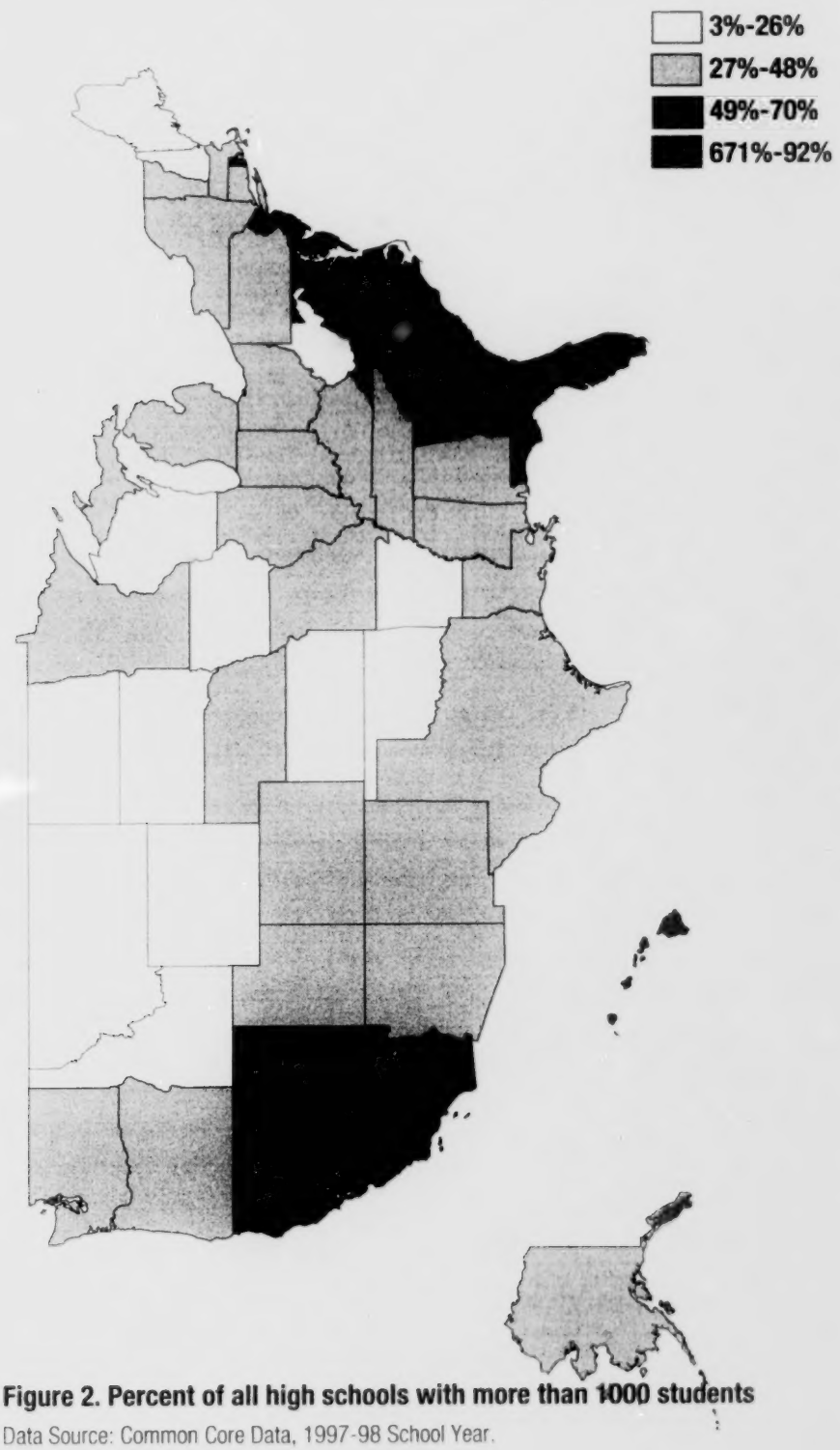

Figure 2. Percent of all high schools with more than 1000 students

Data Source: Common Core Data, 1997-98 School Year.

Alaska and Hawaii not to scale of conterminous U.S.

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in this way, tended to put control of schooling in the hands of elites. One should note that countywide districts consolidate not only schools, but the control of schooling in the hands of fewer, and more influential citizens. Where the county political administration is held by political factions, factionalism can easily carry over to the schools.[16]

The recent appreciation of small schools may not be enough, however, to help retain them in financially strapped (usually impoverished) places. In areas with small schools, the prevailing wisdom may provoke some groups (for example, those that claim to speak for taxpayers) to declare that these schools are "just too expensive" to maintain. The conventional view that larger schools are more cost-effective has been challenged in a number of recent studies.[17] Nonetheless, in many poor rural communities the view prevails that small schools are expensive—more expensive than larger, consolidated schools would be. Evidence of this plight appears in the school case studies presented in this book and in the reports of superintendents interviewed for chapter 2.

Superintendents often claim that due to financial conditions, they have no choice but to propose closures of small schools and construction of larger ones. Because the view that small schools are more expensive to operate prevails so widely, communities' attempts to sustain small schools, resist the construction of megaschools, and create new small schools often engender sharp conflict, heated debate, and acrimony. Superintendents lose their jobs and boards of education fall over the issue, especially in rural or quasi-rural America.

The cross-tabulations of table 2 demonstrate that small schools *have been* widely retained in some states but not in others. For most educators, the domain of possibility is bounded by state borders. Many who lack successful models, therefore, may regard the creation and sustainability of much smaller schools as an impossibility. Educators in the Midwest and East understand that states can operate hundreds of districts. Educators in the South regard whole-county districts as the norm, and for them, the existence of hundreds of smaller districts seems odd. Great Plains educators know that successful, very small high schools are possible and that many of them exist. Table 2 is included to provide a *national view* of variability that *local educators* seldom see or hear about.

Alternatives to closing small high schools do exist, and the purpose of this book is to demonstrate that fact and provide information about these alternatives. The editors and the researchers want to help communities, local boards of education, state education agencies, and local district superintendents fully realize those alternatives. Much of what will be said can apply to urban neighborhoods as well as rural communities.

The Importance of Small Size to Student Achievement in Impoverished Communities[18]

Some observers believe that too many American high schools have become dysfunctional institutions and that many more are dangerously close to becoming dysfunctional.[19] The criticisms apply to high schools that serve upscale communities, as well as to megaschools that enroll thousands of students of color in urban ghettoes. The criticisms would surely also apply to some small high schools.

This critique has a prestigious lineage that can be traced at least as far back as James Coleman's *Adolescent Society*, the 1961 classic about cliques in American high schools. Coleman studied four high schools and concluded that

> the norms of the [high school] system constitute more than an aggregate of individual attitudes; they actually pull these attitudes away from scholarship. The implication is striking: the adolescents themselves are not to be held responsible for the norms of their adolescent cultures.[20] (p. 304)

In Coleman's view, high school socialization practices, sponsored by adults, worked to subvert academic accomplishment in institutions established to further such accomplishment. While Coleman's 1961 argument about the comprehensive high school was perhaps subtle, by 1991 the situation in many such high schools, especially those in impoverished communities, was so bad that author Jonathan Kozol observed

> It is obvious that urban schools have other problems in addition to their insufficient funding. Administrative chaos is endemic in some urban systems. . . . Greater funding, if it were intelligently applied, could partially correct these problems . . . but it probably is also true

> that *major structural reforms would still be needed* [emphasis added].[21]

One response to the dilemma of operating large, impersonal, bureaucratic high schools is the creation of *schools-within-schools*, academic *houses*, and "*mini-schools*." In these arrangements, students are grouped according to one scheme or another in order to personalize their experiences. The idea is that each unit *simulate* the atmosphere found in a well-organized, actual smaller school. The idea of breaking up large schools in this way is much older than most people realize. Like *inquiry learning*, house plans and schools-within-schools are ideas that originated in the era of progressive education at the end of the nineteenth century.[22]

Another response has been to separate grades into their own schools. At the high school level, for instance, some urban districts have created *ninth grade academies*. Certainly removing 850 ninth graders from a 9-12 school enrolling 3,400 students will yield two schools enrolling fewer students. However, some researchers have argued that *enrollment per grade*, not total number of students enrolled, is the best measure of school size.[23] Their logic goes like this: schools are composed of widely varying grade levels, and comparing a K-12 school with 1,000 students to a K-4 school with 1,000 students is not appropriate. These researchers argue that a K-4 school enrolling 1,000 students is in effect much larger than a K-12 school with 1,000 students. On these grounds, the ninth grade academy with 850 students is exactly the same practical size as the 9-12 school with 3,400 students.

Both options (that is, house plans and grade-level academies) are administrative maneuvers to improve bad situations by simulating the conditions of small size. However, as Mary Anne Raywid points out, a lot can go wrong with these simulations.[24] Often, she warns, the desired benefits never appear. Moreover, the culture of the school remains the same. The leadership remains the same, the subunits fail to or aren't permitted to articulate their own visions of a good education, the subunits operate with neither financial nor professional autonomy, innovation in one subunit becomes the object of resentment and jealousy in another, and the "houses" can actually reinstate the tracking that is so difficult to avoid in large schools.[25] In short, structural conditions do make a difference.

The educational world has begun to accept the idea that huge schools, combined with other negative factors, make academic achievement difficult for poor inner-city kids. There is also rather considerable and longstanding agreement among prominent researchers that small schools stand a better chance at becoming "excellent" or "effective" than larger schools. Deborah Meier believes that *only* small schools give their faculties the chance to collaborate closely, and that without such collaboration, neither teachers nor administrators have much influence over school culture.[26] In very large schools, the requirements of *merely keeping order* prevail. When factors associated with high poverty enter schools serving poor communities, even order becomes increasingly difficult to maintain. The struggle to secure a safe environment takes priority over intellectual nurture. Learning becomes a luxury in these conditions.[27]

And indeed, the time and space to learn is a *luxury* for many children. Interestingly, the word *school* is derived from an ancient Greek word for "leisure" (*schōle*).[28] Children who lead impoverished or otherwise threatened lives often do not have the "leisure" or luxury of paying much attention to their schooling.[29] They require much more support from us all if they are to succeed. We have the power to remedy the situation, even in our limited roles as educators.

Small school size is a goal we can pursue that will especially benefit impoverished children and their schools. In Chicago, Michael Klonsky and the Small Schools Workshop has been working for nearly a decade to *foster the creation of new small schools*—not simulations or subunits, but autonomous, freestanding schools—with their own leadership structures, philosophies, and (usually) self-selected faculties. Similar work is underway in other cities as well, including New York City, where Deborah Meier helped pioneer the return of small schools.[30]

Both Klonsky and Meier, it is important to note, are keenly concerned with social justice. That is, they believe that poor children and communities often receive unfair treatment from the institutions of society, principally because they lack political and economic power. Advocating for the creation and improvement of small schools and the ensuing benefits for poor children helps overcome some of the inequality that poverty engenders. If small schools are more expensive per pupil, Klonsky and Meier argue, the difference is slight compared to the

benefits. Another way to say this is that smaller schools for poor children are considerably more cost effective than large ones, at least in terms of such utilitarian measures as achievement per dollar or dollars per graduate.[31]

The success achieved in creating small schools in urban areas is impressive and justly celebrated. Yet, the story in this book is about small high schools that are being maintained and sustained—often against considerable odds—in *rural* areas. Our discussion focuses specifically on four small high schools that are sustained by their rural communities to the point that they might be said to "flourish." These high schools are not new, but have been in existence for at least 10 years, though one of them was reestablished in the mid 1980s.

School Size: The Priority of Structure

In the school effectiveness literature of the 1980s and 1990s, size is interesting not from a structural perspective, but because of its modest influence on outcomes, especially for poor children. In addition, small size is also viewed as containing "processes" that might be transplanted to other settings; for instance, from small private to large public schools.[32] In other words, in this literature, size is either a *footnote to effectiveness* or a *container* of more important processes that could be scaled up to larger settings.

Many educators reluctantly greet interpretations, such as the one proposed here, of the role of size as a *structural condition* of U.S. schooling that needs attention. Their reluctance is understandable. Structure is by definition a durable feature of an institution. Process is more amenable to change. Educators therefore have generally disparaged the role of structure and focused attention on the role of process. From the vantage of daily practice, this focus makes sense. Teaching and leading schools are part of a daily process. Changing the school structure is not regularly considered.

How would structural change be accomplished? When smaller structures are considered, the most likely route is to create subunits (for example, schools-within-schools, house plans, and so forth), not new, smaller schools with autonomous leadership, finances, and faculties. The latter is a challenge to the mental model of everyday administration and teaching. Mental models, according to Peter Senge, can

severely constrain action and creativity. Getting beyond the usual mental model can compel one to realize practical alternatives. Both the urban initiatives and successful rural resistance to consolidation attest to this fact.[33]

Rural superintendents may be in a better position than teachers and principals to develop a sense of structural differences among schools and districts, but many spend most of their time with processes.[34] And, when it comes to making decisions about how to build new schools, they are as subject to conventional thinking as the average citizen. Too often conventional thinking suggests that (1) it is not economically viable to maintain existing small rural schools and (2) the only choice is construction of a single large school, because the cost per square foot is somewhat cheaper per student.

Recent research and current events, however, have challenged the conventional predisposition to process over structure. First, nearly a decade of research on school size has developed a preponderance of evidence to suggest that smaller school size improves schooling in impoverished communities.[35] Second, episodes of shooting tragedies in schools have brought school size to the public's attention. This is one reason why influential Americans, including Secretary Riley, are now considering small size as a possible preventive measure for addressing school violence.[36]

The attention has not compromised the heightened position that process enjoys. Nonetheless the change in view is dramatic. No longer does size appear merely as either a footnote to effectiveness studies or as a container of essentially interesting processes, but as one distinct phenomenon. School size now matters in discourse.

How Does Small Size Work?

Because studies that indicate increased achievement levels for impoverished students attending small schools are so recent, we do not know with much certainty how this benefit is realized. Previous research is filled with findings that suggest interesting hypotheses that should guide ongoing work.[37]

School participation among marginal students. The key insight comes from Barker and Gump's 35-year-old work about small Kansas high schools. The insight is key because it is conceptual as much as it is

empirical. That is, it comes from the idea of *the school.* Schools carry out institutional purposes that are remarkably the same whatever their size. If they did not carry out these purposes, we would not be able to recognize them as schools.

In general, however, whether a high school enrolls 150 students or 5,000 students, it will have classes, teachers, students, a curriculum, and, most critically, a cocurriculum. That is, it will have sports teams, a band, student publications, and a variety of clubs. In order to keep small schools functioning as recognizable schools every student must participate in the cocurriculum. The loss of just a few kids can jeopardize the basketball program, the school yearbook, or the cheerleading squad. In many small schools, *all the students* experience intense pressure to participate in school activities. Adults actively recruit students for the programs for which they are responsible.

The result is that it is much more difficult for "marginal" students to remain on the sidelines in small schools. These students are recruited to take part in the life of the school. Even if their performance is not always wonderful, their contributions are elicited and appreciated. As a result, talent is developed more equitably in small schools. Further, and perhaps most importantly, the reinforcing experiences students receive from these activities are likely to lead to other good experiences. While these outcomes are not a certainty, the odds of achieving them are probably better in small schools. It is certainly possible for a small school to be dysfunctional, but the odds of this are substantially diminished by its size. The odds of student failure also seem to diminish.

Faculty communication. More than ever, it seems, we appreciate the concept of *school culture.* Whether we call it *climate, culture,* or *ethos,* the significance of regarding schools as unique organizations staffed by unique people is no longer overlooked. What do we value? How do we show it? How do we cultivate it? Schools vary in the way they address these questions.

Faculties can have a tremendous influence on school culture, given the right circumstances. Given the wrong circumstances, their influence may be less significant than that of the state department of education, the state school board, or the district central office. For faculties to develop a sense of common purpose, they must communicate routinely, comfortably, and intently.

Deborah Meier says that a school's faculty should be able to assemble around one table.[38] She uses this image to illustrate the quality of communication that small school size facilitates. Faculties in smaller schools enjoy greater odds that they will communicate routinely, comfortably, and intently. They are more likely to assemble easily to plan school improvement initiatives and instructional activities. They can more readily foster curriculum integration (teaching that crosses the usual subject barriers) and talk directly about the academic threats and challenges affecting their students.[39] Again, small size improves the odds. It doesn't guarantee results. It is important to note that the prospects for this type of communication in large, bureaucratic high schools are very poor.

Community ownership. We often hear schools referred to as cultures or *communities*. These are useful metaphors, but educators often forget that they *are* just metaphors. A school culture is a much more limited and fragile phenomenon than the local culture that surrounds the school. In comparison, school cultures are easily undone, redone, and done-in. For example, replacing a good principal with a bad one may result in the school culture becoming instantly debilitated. Rural cultures are subject to significant upheaval as well, but their recovery taps a level and depth of strength, memory, and kinship that schools often lack. Similar observations apply to the community metaphor. A "learning community" implements a vision of common academic purpose, but it is a manufactured community. Schools are surely well advised to develop such a common purpose, but a "learning community" cannot provide the connections and meanings that actual communities do (see chapters 4-7); that is, not unless actual communities infuse the life of the school.[40]

Small size permits schools to connect better with *actual* local cultures and communities. In return, cultures and communities can reinforce teachers' and administrators' efforts to achieve good school climates and effective learning communities.[41] It is thus easier for communities to exert ownership of small schools. Interestingly, Catholic schools often do a better job of promoting the common good than public schools, according to Tony Bryk and colleagues, because they are usually connected to living cultures and communities and because their small size gives them better odds of benefitting from these connections.[42]

In too many American towns and rural areas, schools have been consolidated beyond the point where local communities are likely to exert such ownership. These larger rural schools may be less responsive to and less appreciative of local cultures, and they may not welcome the participation of citizens to the same extent that smaller schools do. These hypotheses have not been studied very well to date, but the existing research base does lend credibility to the hypotheses.

Common purpose and curricular focus. Large schools differentiate administrators, teachers, and students. Tracking that reinforces students' advantages and disadvantages can become a prominent and entrenched technology in such schools. In this sense, large schools also serve to differentiate communities and society generally. Instead of common purpose, large size tends to promote unfair privilege. Again, the hypothesis in this case concerns odds and not certainties. Nonetheless, the research literature on tracking in large schools is ominous.[43]

Small size may actually enable common purpose in two ways: it facilitates better communication among faculty and it *necessitates* a narrower curriculum. Some small schools may merely offer a narrow curriculum of traditional courses. But many smaller schools see a narrow curriculum as an opportunity to achieve curricular focus and to raise expectations.[44] They may ask, "Is it worthwhile to offer remedial math? Or would a support system to help everyone succeed in algebra make more sense? Do we really need the prestige of offering calculus ourselves, or could we arrange a distance-learning option for the few students prepared to take it? Can we use community institutions and enterprises as part of the English curriculum? Or is it absolutely essential to offer British and American literature?" Answers to such questions will vary widely among schools.

There is some impediment, however, to realizing locally defined curricular focus. Systemic reform advocates commonly use the benchmark expression "what every child should know and be able to do." Yet noted observer of schooling, Jerome Bruner, and many others doubt that any such essential body of knowledge exists.

> The objective of skilled agency and collaboration in the study of the human condition is to achieve not unanimity, but more consciousness. And more consciousness always implies more diversity.[45]

Within a public system of schooling, small schools help achieve the *diversity of learning and understanding* to be required of our cultures, our communities, and our society in the coming century.

Notes

1. The study did not labor under obligations that required the schools to be represented in an unrealistically favorable light. Researchers might have concluded that any or all of these schools were *not* actually flourishing.

2. R. Bickel and C. Howley, "The Influence of Scale on Student Performance: A Multi-Level Extension of the Matthew Principle," *Education Policy Analysis Archives,* 2000 [On-line serial] 8(22) (2000). http://olam.ed.asu.edu/epaa/v8n22/

3. See Bickel and Howley, "The Influence of Scale," for a description of related studies in seven states.

4. See, for example, J. Sher, *Heavy Meddle: A Critique of the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction's Plan to Mandate School District Mergers Throughout the State* (Raleigh: North Carolina School Boards Association, 1986).

5. P. Theobald, *Teaching the Commons: Place, Pride, and the Renewal of Community* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1997).

6. J. Stern, ed., *The Condition of Education in Rural Small Schools* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 1994).

7. But small size and rural character are *unlikely* causes of inefficiency and ineffectiveness. Instead, the probable causes include unstable staffing, low expectations, neglect from district leadership (see, for example, M. Hughes, "Similar Students, Dissimilar Opportunities for Success: High- and Low-Achieving Elementary Schools in Rural, High Poverty Areas of West Virginia," *Journal of Research in Rural Education* 15[1]: 47-58 [1999]) and lack of local jobs (see, for example, R. Bickel, S. Banks, and L. Spatig, "Bridging the Gap Between High School and College in an Appalachian State: A Near-Replication of Florida Research," *Journal of Research in Rural Education* 7[2]: 75-87 [1991]). Such conditions are contingent on the way power is exercised in districts and states and nationally.

8. P. Kannapel and A. DeYoung, "The Rural School Problem in 1999: A Review and Critique of the Literature," *Journal of Research in Rural Education* 15(2): 67-79 (1999).

9. This includes only those regular schools with grade 12 the highest and grade 9 the lowest. Data come from the most recent CD-ROM version of the National Center for Education Statistics' *Common Core of Data*, in which the latest available information pertains to the 1997-1998 academic year.

10. M. Raywid, *Current Literature on Small Schools* (ERIC Digest) (Charleston, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, 1999), ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 425 049.

11. R. Riley, "Schools as Centers of Community" (speech delivered at the annual meeting of the American Institute of Architects, Washington, DC, 1999.) http://www.ed.gov/Speeches/10-1999/991013.html

12. See, for example, D. Meier, *The Power of Their Ideas: Lessons for America from a Small School in Harlem*, (Boston: Beacon, 1995).

13. See Riley, "Schools as Centers of Community"; and Education Commission of the States, "Hot Topics: Small Schools," *Commission Connection* (excerpted from *The Progress of Education Reform, 1999-2000)*(Denver, CO: Author, September 1999).

14. See also C. Howley, "How to Make Rural Education Research 'Rural': An Essay at Practical Advice," *Journal of Research in Rural Education* 13(2): 131-38 (1997). For the most affluent communities, Howley proposed an upper limit of about 1,000 students in grades 9-12 high schools. In "Hot Topics: Small Schools," the Education Commission of the States reports that "while there is no agreement about what school size is ideal, the consensus of researchers is that no school should serve more than 1,000 students and that elementary schools should not exceed 300 to 400 students. There is also a general acknowledgment that the huge 2,000-, 3,000-, and 4,000-student schools now in use are much too large." Other research (see resources in Chapter 9) strongly suggests that in impoverished communities, the upper limits need to be 50 percent lower or more.

15. Compare to Howley, "How to Make Rural Education Research 'Rural'"; and Raywid, *Current Literature on Small Schools*.

16. See C. Duncan, *Worlds Apart: Why Poverty Persists in Rural America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999); and J. Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1980) for compatible views.

17. See, for instance, L. Stiefel, R. Berne, P. Iatarola, and N. Fruchter, "High School Size: Effects on Budgets and Performance in New York City," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 22(1): 27-39 (2000).

18. Recent research suggests that the influence of size on achievement is such that impoverished communities need schools that are consistently smaller than those in affluent communities (see, for instance, Bickel and Howley, "The Influence of Scale on Student Performance". But these findings *do not* mean that megaschools (enrolling upwards of 2,000 students) are sensible arrangements even for the affluent! *Megaschools* are probably harmful in many ways, regardless of level of affluence. The alienation and social stratification that such institutions can breed is arguably not healthy for democracy (see Meier, *The Power of Their Ideas*). The expensive, elite private schools in New England, Phillips Exeter and Phillips Andover, enroll only about 1,000 students in grades 9-12.

19. See, for example, Meier, *The Power of Their Ideas*; National Association of Secondary School Principals and the Carnegie Foundation, *Breaking Ranks: Changing an American Institution* (Reston, VA: Author, 1996), ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 393 205; and Riley, "Schools as Centers of Community."

20. J. Coleman. *Adolescent Society*. (Glencoe, NY: Free Press, 1961), 304.

21. J. Kozol, *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools,* (New York: Crown, 1991), 124.

22. K. Plath, *Schools Within Schools: A Study of High School Organization,* (New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1965); and *Roland Michener Secondary School House System* (1970), ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 046 131.

23. See, for example, N. Friedkin and J. Necochea, "School System Size and Performance: A Contingency Perspective," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 10(3): 237-49 (1988); and C. Howley and R. Bickel, *The Matthew Project: National Report,* (Randolph, VT: Rural School and Communtiy Trust Policy Program, 1999), ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 433 174.

24. M. Raywid, *Taking Stock: The Movement to Create Mini-Schools, Schools-within-Schools, and Separate Small Schools,* Urban Diversity Series No. 108, (New York: ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education, 1996), ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 396 045.

25. Compare to Meier, *The Power of Their Ideas.*

26. Ibid.

27. Again, the point here is not *causation* but *association.* Whether the disadvantages and outright threats that jeopardize the lives of children in impoverished communities are compounded (often in large schools) or mitigated (often in smaller schools) is a matter of odds and multiple, indirect influences, not certainty.

28. In a classical sense, going to school means entering a space and period of time set part from the struggle for the means of existence, and instead spending one's days in the less immediately useful and altogether more leisurely quest to understand the world.

29. In the developing world, where poverty and malnutrition are prevalent, schooling is better recognized for the luxury it actually is. See, for example, Food and Agriculture Organization, *The State of Food Insecurity in the World, 1999: When People Must Live with Hunger and Fear Starvation* (New York: United Nations, 1999).

30. M. Klonsky, *Small Schools: The Numbers Tell a Story: A Review of the Research and Current Experiences* (Chicago: Small Schools Workshop, 1995), ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 386 517. See also E. Clinchy, *Creating New Schools: How Small Schools Are Changing American Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2000).

31. L. Stiefel, P. Iatarola, N. Fruchter, and R. Berne, *The Effects of Size of Student Body on School Costs and Performance in New York City High Schools,* (New York: New York University, Institute for Education and Social Policy, 1998), ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 420 464.

32. See, for example, G. Burtless, *Does Money Matter?* (Washington, DC: Brookings, 1996); and A. Bryk, V. Lee, and P. Holland, *Catholic Schools and the Common Good,* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993). Burtless devotes a scant three pages to school size, and Bryk and colleagues do not accord size a very prominent role in their various discussions of and research into Catholic education.

33. Compare to P. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* (New York: Doubleday, 1990).

34. "Processes" in this discussion include the changeable curricular, instructional, and administrative *procedures* of schooling—day-to-day classroom and administrative practice. Structural features of schooling in this discussion refer especially to the most durable features of schooling: size of schools or districts, in particular, but the overall pattern of class and race segregation in the U.S. that tends to produce "rich" and "poor" schools might also be considered a structural feature of schooling.

35. C. Howley, *What is the Effect of Small-Scale Schooling on Student Achievement?* (ERIC Digest) (Charleston, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, 1989), ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 308 062; K. Irmsher, *School Size* (ERIC Digest) (Eugene, OR: ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, 1997); and M. Raywid, *Current Literature on Small Schools.*

36. In a study of 175 rural schools, Emil Haller concluded that increases in the size of small rural high schools have little practical effect on "school indiscipline." Haller's study also suggests that increases beyond a certain threshold of large size will actually increase student disorder. This does not mean that small rural high schools are immune from violence. Again, it is a question of odds, not causality.

37. See, for example, R. Barker and P. Gump, *Big School, Small School* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1964); W. Fowler, "What Do We Know about School Size? What Should We Know?" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, April 1992) ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 347 675.

38. Meier, *The Power of Their Ideas.*

39. T. Gregory and G. Smith, *High Schools as Communities: The Small School Reconsidered* (Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappa, 1987), ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 278 518.

40. We are *not* suggesting here that all rural communities are knit together by common purpose. Indeed, in some areas they are torn apart by a political economy based on wealth for a few and powerlessness for most residents (Duncan, *Worlds Apart*; Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness*). Moreover, most communities, like most individual people, fail in some ways to realize their full potential. Schools definitely have a role to play in advancing the cause of "common purpose" in practically all communities—rural, suburban, and urban.

41. Bryk, Lee, and Holland, *Catholic Schools*; and J. Kleinfeld, *Inventive Teaching: The Heart of the Small School* (Fairbanks: Center for Cross-Cultural Studies, University of Alaska, Fairbanks, 1992). ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 349 153.

42. It is often said that rural school cultures, rural cultures, and rural communities are strongly linked. Many rural people insist that "if you destroy the school, you destroy the community." The editors have heard this remark made many times by rural community members and rural educators alike. The research evidence, however, is not at all clear on the issue, possibly because the links are complex and sometimes

contradictory. See, for example, J. Stabler and M. Olfert, "Saskatchewan's Rural Communities in an Urbanizing World," *Rural Development Perspectives* 9(2): 21-28 (1994). In general, the evidence suggests that the influences that undermine a community also simultaneously undermine the sustainability of its school.

43. See, for example, A. Gamoran, "The Variable Effects of High School Tracking," *American Sociological Review* 57(6): 812-28 (1992); and J. Oakes, *Keeping Track: How Schools Structure Inequality* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985). Tracking is "ominous" because although it diminishes opportunities for poor people and people of color, it has proven remarkably difficult to eliminate.

44. C. Roellke, *Curriculum Adequacy and Quality in High Schools Enrolling Fewer than 400 Pupils 9-12* (Eric Digest) (Charleston, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, 1996), ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 401 090.

45. J. Bruner, *The Culture of Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 97.

CHAPTER 2

Sustaining Our Extant Small High Schools

CRAIG B. HOWLEY

The case studies in chapters 4-7 indicate that sustaining small rural high schools is a challenge that varies from moderate to strenuous. This chapter anticipates many readers' pressing need to know *what can be done* to meet this challenge.

So, before getting into the details of the case studies, the editors want to follow up the presentation of the overall issue described in the previous chapter with some more practical counsel. We did not develop this counsel alone, but with the help of a diverse group of rural superintendents we interviewed in the spring of 2000. This chapter owes a great deal to their gifts of time and insight.[1]

The Limited Merit of Conventional Wisdom about Small Rural High Schools

According to some observers, small rural high schools have seldom received appropriate attention from education researchers and leaders or policymakers, at the national level.[2] Some state leaders may believe that small rural high schools contribute something to the common good, but, in general, such schools are probably not widely regarded, even at the state level, as likely or logical sites of excellence.

From a statistical perspective, there are good reasons for state policymakers to hold such a view. First, the larger number of such high schools (proportionate to the total number of students they serve), means they will exhibit more variation than a smaller number of large schools. Consequently, if standardized schooling is the aim, small school size can be understood as an inherent problem. The more schools there are, the greater the possibility of deviation from the desired standard.

Second, with academic standards in place, standards-based achievement test scores of a small high school will, on average, vary much more from year to year than they will in a larger school. This situation is an obvious challenge for an accountability system as it makes measuring true performance difficult, at least on a year-by-year basis. And a year-by-year comparison is built into school and district "report cards" issued by some states.

These technical considerations, however, should not be understood as pointless abstractions. They connect directly to an administrative issue of critical importance: *span of control.*[3] Span of control simply refers to the number of persons (or, in the case of systems of schooling, the number of units) supervised. It's an old concept in the literature on management. According to traditional administrative theory, the more complex the task, the narrower the span of control should be.[4] Traditional administrative theory also suggests that if the span of control is too wide, organizational efficiency suffers.

Thus, from the perspective of managing state systems of schooling, having too many small schools and districts is apt to be considered a threat to efficiency. This claim should have a familiar ring to it. In the past, small size has been construed as a practical barrier[5] to the constitutional requirements in many states to operate "thorough and efficient" systems of schooling.[6]

The state's *responsibility* to gain control of the system of schooling is a powerful imperative. Supporters of small-scale schooling, especially in the rural context, need to understand this point very well. Reluctance by state education agencies (SEAs) and state governments to increase the number of small schools in metropolitan areas—and their reluctance to retain or support them in rural areas—hinges on traditional perspectives about management and school quality. Financial problems

are grounded in these traditional perspectives. Indeed, a shortage of funds can, and often does, cause small schools and districts to consolidate. Yet, financial problems are just symptomatic of more complex causes.

Nontraditional Perspectives

Supporters of small-scale schooling often do not operate from a traditional administrative perspective. They appreciate the greater informality, the more personable organizational climate, and the interdependence often found in small schools and districts, especially those in rural locales. At the beginning of the twentieth century, small schools were an "alternative" that the profession sought to reform out of existence. The one-room school and the K-12 school have, in fact, nearly been eliminated. And yet, smaller schools and districts—many of them quite small by cosmopolitan standards—continue to thrive in rural places. Today, these smaller units are increasingly providing a positive alternative to the failed products of traditional school management perspectives; that is, the perspectives that helped create larger and larger schools in the previous century.

Increasingly, in fact, alternative perspectives in school administration are being celebrated. Theorists like Peter Senge and Margaret Wheatley, for instance, insist that change cannot *ever* be planned or controlled in a predictable way.[7] In a sense, they claim, organizations constitute themselves as a complex synergy of the values and purposes of the individuals that inhabit them. This synergy can be negative as well as positive, however. If individuals are not working together, not fulfilling themselves and each other, or if purposes are forced rather than created jointly, the organization will languish or even founder. In organizations understood this way, such qualities as diversity, openness of communication, decentralization, and localism are not violations of good organization, but the capacities on which organizational vigor depends.[8] According to such views, much of what administrators have been taught in the past century was just plain *wrong*.

Observers like Senge and Wheatley seem also to harbor an implicit criticism of the kind of improvement planning that many states require of schools and districts. According to these theorists, not only would

span of control be an outdated notion in education, but the quest for old-style administrative control would be misguided. Promulgating standards and high-stakes accountability measures would likely have negative effects on organizational capacity, instead of the positive ones anticipated by the various branches of government and segments of the education profession. Standardization of goals, processes, and conditions are recipes for mediocrity or failure, according to this view. Perhaps this is the reason that so much reform has sponsored so little change.[9]

These new views of the organization have profound implications for organizational leadership. First, and most obviously, the old preoccupations of management (command and control) are seen as inappropriate intrusions into the natural life of an organization. Second, leadership is understood as synergistic rather than individualistic; an effective organization necessarily has *many*, rather than few, leaders. Third, the organization has a life of its own, a life that will unfold in harmony or in conflict with "management." Bad management will distort that natural unfolding. Good management will facilitate it. Finally, people in leadership roles (whatever their titles) become *organizational stewards*, instead of the traditional "directors," "managers," "executives," or "superintendents." Leaders who are stewards become guardians of common purpose and articulators of the organizational mission and aspirations, rather than despots or warriors whipping "the troops" into shape. They usually understand, facilitate, convene, initiate, and counsel. Much more seldom do they order, direct, demand, or command. Stewards are *part* of the organization and its culture. They are not outsiders brought in to make the organization do someone else's bidding. This notion has, by the way, already been applied to schooling. Thomas Sergiovanni has written quite a bit about leadership as stewardship (see chapter 8).

Small Schools and Nontraditional Perspectives

One might expect that the ideals of stewardship and nontraditional conceptions of organizations would find a supportive audience among educators. Unfortunately, under traditional administrative theories, small high schools are *still* commonly regarded as inefficient, and the rural communities that most commonly maintain them are often re-

garded as backward, in part because they so adamantly defend their small high schools.

In many cases, lacking influential backers, latitude in the state policy context, and large enrollments, small schools exist under the constant threat of closure.[10] These threats are evident in the schools described in chapters 4 and 6. The school belonging to the community in chapter 5 actually *was* closed at one time in the name of national security.

This chapter concerns itself with ways to make that threatened existence less precarious. It is concerned with ways to sustain and even recreate the small high schools that have disappeared from so many American locales *and not just rural locales.*

The focus is on small rural high schools, but the underlying issues—as our reference to dynamic systems theory indicates—have more to do with practical ways to organize support than with old-style ways to take control of the situation. We aren't offering a five-step solution guaranteed to work everywhere. That's old-style management thinking. The nation's system of schooling needs change, and we conclude that it needs the kind of change that will enable small schools to flourish. This chapter will shortly identify both characteristic problems and appropriate responses to the problems. More importantly, the chapter offers a view of the *system of relationships* responsible for the threats that jeopardize small-scale schooling. Understanding that system provides a leverage not possible otherwise. Let's start by identifying the key technical problems, as named by the superintendents with whom we spoke, and then looking at appropriate responses.

The Presenting Technical Problems[11]

The superintendents identified four key, interrelated factors often involved in simply *retaining* small rural high schools.

Funding. Securing adequate funds to operate small rural high schools is regarded as the major challenge. In some states, small rural high schools were often much more expensive to operate per pupil than other schools, sometimes three or four times more expensive, with per pupil expenditures reportedly as high as $16,000. However, in cases of extreme per-pupil expenditure disparity, the comparison usually was to statewide averages and not to other schools in the same vicinity. These

districts with very high per-pupil expenditures tended to be located in remote areas that operated just one *very small* high school.

Outmigration. In many rural areas of the nation, such as parts of the agricultural Great Plains and in western and eastern mining regions, people are leaving. As local economies stagnate, residents see the opportunity for a decent life dwindle. Eventually they move away in search of better opportunities. The result is declining school enrollments. In boom and bust communities, schools will enroll hundreds of children in one decade, and in the next, a relatively new school building will be abandoned.

Personnel. In many states, not only are local rural economies stagnant or declining, but salaries for teachers are not competitive. Property-poor districts are positioned to lose the competition for highly qualified staff. Property-poor, economically stagnant rural places can lose even more. Their young people move away and don't return to teach. Local teachers are at risk of being lured away by higher salaries, and even adventurous young outsiders cannot be enticed to take the vacated teaching jobs.

Curriculum standards. State policies determine what sort of curricula are acceptable in public schools. With elementary schools, even very small rural elementary schools, the requirements are not perceived as burdensome. Elementary teachers teach almost everything, and grouping two or three grade levels under one teacher is a common rural practice. High schools, however, are required to offer a variety of academic and vocational classes. In a very small high school, that is, one with 70 students in grades 9-12, staffing the mandated curriculum is a tough proposition.

Seasoned school administrators will understand exactly the ways these technical problems are related to one another: curriculum standards implicate an intensity of staffing, which, in turn, implicates a level of funding. Outmigration affects implementation of the curriculum, as well as funding via a dwindling tax base, and it weakens community motivation to participate in the life of the school.

If a high school is small, that is, it enrolls between 100 and 200 students in grades 9-12, staffing the required course offerings can be difficult enough.[12] Now imagine that enrollment is steadily declining, year by year. The challenge grows ever more difficult. And, of course,

the causes of outmigration (for instance, the closing of a large mine, depressed farm commodity prices, or the collapse of local businesses) eventually degrade the district's tax base.

Typical Solutions

Typical solutions? The first is to take a technical approach, in traditional management style, and fiddle with the details of each problem, hoping against hope that taking care of the small things will make it unnecessary to address or even acknowledge the big dilemmas. This is a defensive posture.

The second approach is to close schools and reorganize with a neighboring district. This is an aggressive posture. In this case, if the neighboring district is experiencing similar problems, the "solution" seems mostly to put the downward cycle on firmer footing. Eventually, in this downward cycle (perhaps after the next round of district mergers), some upper limit of travel time or transportation expense puts the district in a special category: *remote and necessarily small.* These schools are so remote that further consolidation is not practical. The bus rides would become too dangerous or too long. To fulfill compulsory attendance laws, ways have to be found to keep them open. They are the exceptions, but we nonetheless heard of several cases just like this during our interviews for this chapter.

These two typical "solutions" have intensified the challenges of sustaining small high schools because they do not address complex dilemmas (for instance, interactions among influences and the hold that traditional professional norms have on our thinking) that make sustainability so difficult.

Rethinking Problems and Solutions

Perhaps a third solution exists, one that is necessarily more complex, and less "linear" than the approaches just characterized. In this chapter we are going to introduce a hypothetical "model," in order to suggest the kind of complex and interrelated influences that affect the odds of sustaining a small high school and helping it flourish. This will be a somewhat uncommon picture of "systemic reform."

Before we address that model, let's notice something important. The traditional span of control perspective and the four key technical

problems outlined earlier add up to a *very different picture from the one presented in chapter 1,* where small schools were associated with many positive qualities and outcomes. What's going on here?

The technical problems that superintendents report are not inherent characteristics of small-scale schooling. When it is said that operating small schools is difficult or challenging, what is meant is that the conditions under which they operate impose challenges and difficulties. Yet, these challenges and difficulties have little or nothing to do with size per se. Size *does not* cause the problems. Instead, it is truer to say that a system of relationships causes the problems.

This distinction is important because it lets us see that the underlying dilemma has to do with a much larger organization of which small high schools are a part. In other words, technical problems have been created for small schools, *partly* through professional norms and education policy. Districts that operate small high schools are required to abide by those policies and adhere to those norms. See below for an example of how professional norms have impacted schooling in the discussion of "optimal size."

Small rural schools have also been affected by the overall politics and economics that have degraded rural communities for at least 50 years and probably a lot longer than that. Briefly, rural areas have been depopulated by the industrialization of agriculture. Mechanization and communications have also undercut the bases of local economies. This is a large subject that cannot be dealt with adequately in this book, but many accessible interpretations exist, some written especially for rural educators.[13] Such observations don't by any means imply a return to the lifeways of the nineteenth century! To the contrary, some observers (see footnote 11) argue that technology could and should be used to advance rural interests.

In any case, a systemic view is the sort of new thinking[14] upon which to base a third way. It is absolutely necessary to understand that the cause of small school problems is not something inherent in small scale, but rather in the administrative, political, and economic structures that prevail in the wider society.

Before considering some specific strategies to address systemic issues, let's consider the issue of "optimal size" as a case of professional norms in action.

"Optimal Size": A Case of Norms in Complex Action

Many professional norms are unofficial, but administrators acquire them in their association with other administrators and in professional training programs and literature. Norms are powerful and become basic, unquestioned assumptions.

Official policies are often more easily adjusted than internalized norms because policies seemingly originate outside us and are easier to examine. Superintendents of small rural districts become quite adept at making adjustments to new policies.[15] They are often less flexible, though, when it comes to adjusting their own internalized professional norms.[16]

Take, for example, the issue of "optimal size" for high schools. What size is best?

One thing that even seasoned administrators *don't* fully understand, in our experience, is that the norms for the size of schools and districts vary remarkably from state to state. That is why we include table 2 and figures 1 and 2 in the first chapter. It certainly looks as if no particular size is best everywhere.

The profession has, however, spent a great deal of energy over the past century trying to determine the "optimal" size for elementary, middle, and high schools no matter where they are located or what sorts of communities they serve. From 1960 through 1990, for instance, 1,200 students or so was thought to be the optimal size for a high school. On these terms, rural high schools with 500 students operated at a disadvantage. Under these norms, schools with just 75 students could hardly be contemplated seriously by the profession. Closure was considered the best option.

We wondered to what extent these traditional norms might be reflected in the thinking of those we interviewed, all of whom had operated or closed small high schools. We suspected that their views might be tempered by contemporary views of the academic and community value of small schools as interpreted, for instance, in chapter 1.

More than half the superintendents volunteered that they enjoyed working in small rural school districts. About half of these indicated that their small rural schools were the center of the community, with full community participation essential to the school's success. Only a few superintendents reported that their small rural high schools were "too small."[17]

We wanted to know what size high school these superintendents thought was optimal *in their area.* We also wanted to know what size high school they thought was *too small* and what size *too large.* While their answers cannot be taken as representative (our sample was small and purposive), the range of answers speaks to the issue with *practical* significance. These ranges are reported in table 3.

Table 3
Superintendents' Perception of Sizes for 9-12 High Schools

	Range
Optimal Size Locally:	50 - 750
Too Large (absolutely):	500 - 2,000
Too Small (absolutely):	35 - 50

Notes:
Superintendents in the southern and eastern states did not offer a view of sizes considered "too small."
Statistics are illustrative rather than representative (see text).

These superintendents offered their opinions freely and without reference to the specific positions taken in this book, which were unknown to them. Nonetheless, it is remarkable that "optimal" and "too small" nearly overlap and that "too large" accords rather well with positions taken in the new national reports on high school size (see chapter 1).

The views illustrated in table 3 seem to affirm the conclusion that "optimal" size depends on circumstances.[18] What these superintendents consider too large or too small seems also to depend on their circumstances.

In many states, high school programs enrolling 35-50 students (that is, the "too small" category) would be unimaginable. Indeed, we believe that superintendents in the eastern and southern states would hardly comprehend the possibility of high schools this small. Yet, one superintendent with whom we spoke had *reluctantly* closed a high school that enrolled fewer than 25 students.

Nonetheless, most of the superintendents we interviewed reported that it was a struggle to keep their small high schools open, whatever the size. The others oversaw schools that were not in the bottom of the reported "optimal" size range, where local economies were stable. The superintendents in these cases sometimes also reported that the state funding scheme was adequate to sustain the school.[19]

In other words, what might be considered a "sustainably small" high school in one place might not be considered sustainable in another. The lesson here is that the notion of "optimal" size is place-dependent. Wide consensus existed among these superintendents that schools enrolling fewer than 40 or 50 students in grades 9-12 were absolutely too small. But we did not interview any superintendents from Alaska, where, during the oil boom of the 1980s, very small high schools (often with fewer than 25 students) were created in remote Native Alaskan villages, reportedly with good academic results.[20]

This notion of "sustainably small" schools is not simple, nor is it easily grasped. Small schools are affected by a web of influence, rather than a single path of influence.[21] Some of these influences are susceptible to local action; others require concerted action at the state, regional, or national level. Most of these influences cannot be strictly controlled by anyone. Nonetheless, as chapter 1 suggests, some of the national professional norms regarding size *are* indeed changing.

Strategies for Sustaining Small Rural High Schools

It seems that old-style policymaking (standardization, control, valuing efficiency at the expense of effectiveness) is at odds with new thinking about the academic and community value of small-scale schooling. Those superintendents of small rural high schools with whom we spoke appreciated these benefits.

In the face of the conflict between outdated professional norms (well represented in policy) and emerging professional norms (not yet well represented in policy), what can be done? We have some practical suggestions, which draw heavily on suggestions made by the superintendents.

What state policymakers can do. (1) Provide capital outlay mechanisms that do not require big-school norms. (2) Sustain and improve small schools in impoverished locales, realizing that small schools give

the biggest academic payoff in impoverished communities.[22] (3) Put an enrollment cap on the size of new high schools. That is, states should not just make it possible to sustain small schools; they ought to stop building high schools that are too large, perhaps by setting an *upper limit* on high school size. (4) Revise curriculum policies to implement small-school (rather than big-school) principles. (5) Implement a statewide salary scale.

What district leadership can do. (1) Decide to be small deliberately and not merely by default. Stop aspiring to be a large school. (2) Adopt the perspective that the community is the reason for the school. (3) Make the school useful to the community. (4) Cultivate wide community participation in tough decisions about the system. (5) Cultivate caring, responsiveness, and collaboration in the faculty. (6) Adapt to state policies in ways that further local purposes. (7) Work with others to influence state policy changes. (8) Work with community members to establish a local endowment for the high school. Starting small is a logical beginning.

What community members can do. (1) Elect local board members who will recruit administrators who believe that the community is the reason for the school. (2) Insist on participating in tough decisions about the school system. (3) Develop an endowment as partial insurance for the future of the high school. (4) Participate in making the community a major focus of the school (see chapters 4-7 for different realizations of this focus).

Superintendents

Superintendents play a unique *mediating* role between the state department of education and the local community.[23] This section of the chapter is addressed directly to them.

A superintendent's allegiance to the local community or district is not so certain as it might seem. As noted previously, one can easily adhere to professional norms that seem objective but actually run counter to the interests of rural communities. One such norm reported in our superintendent interviews was the idea of preparing students for "brilliant careers" elsewhere. Some superintendents told us that this is what their schools were doing and what they had to do. Others, however, spoke of the desired and necessary return of graduating

students to the local community after postsecondary schooling. Some even claimed this was happening, and that it was a long tradition (see chapter 4 for a case study describing in detail such a relationship between school and community).

Communities differ sharply from one another. Some of the superintendents consulted for this chapter spoke of divided communities. Some superintendents, it seems, give up hope of working with their communities, believing their efforts are doomed to fail or to get them in trouble.

One superintendent described the importance of keeping the community informed in this way: "Information is something you do *with them,* not something you do *to them.*"[24] The bottom line is simply that a poor community that is intimately engaged in the schooling of its youngsters will often (if permitted by state policy) carry a heavy tax burden in order to retain its school. The school *earns* this support, and while it may not be all that is needed, it is a resource that can, under the stewardship of a responsive superintendent, generate opportunities that would otherwise be inaccessible.

Community engagement. Community devotion does not materialize without the leadership of the superintendent. Not all communities exhibit this devotion, but many—perhaps most—have the capacity. Responsive leadership can bring it out.

It's clear, in any case, that a small high school in a somewhat hostile policy environment cannot survive without the devotion of its local patrons. Though such devotion alone is not sufficient to secure a school's continued existence, it dramatically improves the odds.

Where the devotion does exist, the superintendent needs to reinforce it. Where it does not exist, it needs to be established and carefully cultivated. In some cases, where communities are divided or fragmented (for instance, in the consolidation of schools previously considered rivals), the superintendent may confront a long process of community development. In unfortunate instances, a superintendent can undo a community's devotion, usually before moving on to another job. This scenario is, regrettably, well represented in the literature about the superintendency. The case study in chapter 6 alludes to such an instance.

Urban educator Deborah Meier is famous for her opinion that, as noted in chapter 1, the entire faculty of a school should be able to sit

around one table. A similar principle may apply to opportunities for structuring the relationship between communities and *schools*. Perhaps the criterion should be that *the whole community* (or at least its adult members) should be able to fit in the high school's cafeteria or auditorium. This rule of thumb would suggest that most high schools should be in about the middle of the "optimal" range given in table 3—very consistent with Deborah Meier's optimal size of about 300 or so.[25] The point here is that the ability to gather most, if not all, of the adults in the community for a meeting is a distinct advantage in nurturing the kind of devotion that is needed to sustain small rural high schools. Cultivating a local elite can also be useful, but the broader the base of participation, the more solid the support.

The challenge of district size. The superintendent, as mediator between the state department of education and the community, is better positioned for that role if the high school's district is not too large. Small rural high schools are generally located in small districts.[26] In some states, however, large rural districts enrolling at least several thousand students prevail. These larger rural districts may operate several high schools whose communities vie for limited resources. In these cases, factions of the school board may resent the higher per-pupil expenditures required to maintain a single very small school. Remoteness or dangerous travel conditions, not community engagement, insure the continued existence of the school. A school in such circumstances can lose the dynamic quality that seems to prevail in the schools in our case studies.

The connection between district and school size is considered in two recent studies undertaken by the editors.[27] Results of these studies suggest that achievement and community support are both facilitated by the small size of schools and districts; in short, two doses of small are better. Perhaps part of what is going on in small districts with small schools is that superintendents have a better chance to cultivate community engagement.[28]

Revising our norms. Why we think the way we do is usually something of a mystery. It is an amalgam of prior commitments, experiences, professional training, temperament, influential mentors, and books. Generally, it is not nearly as rational as we like to imagine, but it all adds up to the sense we make of life, or try to make.

School administration professionals usually share a variety of traditional ways of doing things. Some of these traditions, or norms, contradict one another, but the profession could not be identified as such without them. Professional norms reflect the world view of those who hold power. Clearly, the funding problem identified by the superintendents with whom we spoke exemplifies how the views of those in power are manifested in current professional norms on school size. One interpretation is that the influence of those with power has resulted in big-school standards, a tendency toward politically expedient efficiency in fiscal matters, a view of organizations as grounded in technical rationality and top-down control, and a long-standing tendency to disengage from communities.[29]

The system of schooling created by these norms has often been called *the factory model*, and the power it reflects has its base in an industrial view of the world. Schools were supposed to "manufacture" dependable and predictable workers and citizens for that world.[30] This should all sound familiar because most of us are the products of such schooling. We cannot easily escape our formative past; indeed, this system of schooling continues, for understandable reasons, despite our insights into its limitations.

Superintendents who are unaware of new ways of thinking and who operate under the traditional professional norms *cannot* help sustain small high schools, especially small *rural* high schools. Those who are aware, but continue to operate under traditional norms will probably do *damage* to such schools and their districts.

In talking with our colleagues around the nation, including the superintendents who helped us understand the issues for this chapter, we often observed this distinction in action. Some superintendents act as stewards on behalf of their schools. These superintendents talk about community ownership of the schools and how it is essential to consider community opinion on critical issues. In fact, these superintendents seem to put the community first and the profession second. One might deduce from their actions their belief that the profession exists to serve the local community.

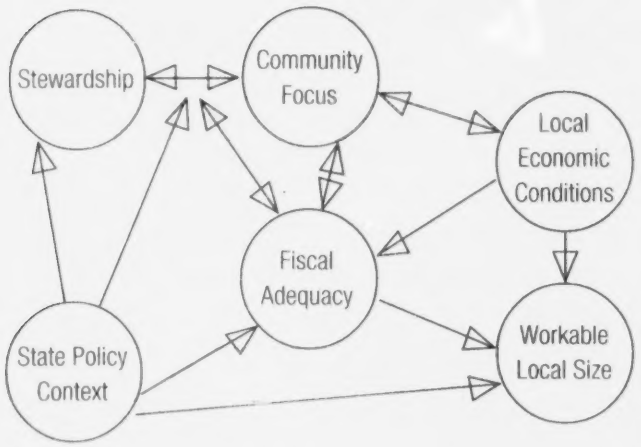
Fortunately, a very wide assortment of resources is available for anyone sufficiently challenged by these insights to want to learn more. From Margaret Wheatley and Peter Senge (popular administrative

writers) to Paul Nachtigal and Paul Theobald (both particularly interested in rural education), there is a large body of diverse works to consult. There is also a network of local and state organizations specifically concerned with rural schools, with resources to support your own local work. See the last chapter for many of these opportunities.

Sustaining Small Rural High Schools (A Model)

Thus far, we have presented suggestions for action for a model we've not yet described. The following model gives a basic understanding of the complex relationships that must be navigated in order to keep small rural high schools almost anywhere afloat (see figure 3). Your experience probably tells you that moving some of the pieces usually causes most of the others to move, too.

Figure 3: Hypothetical Sustainability Model



Explaining the model. As our superintendents told us, without adequate funding, small schools founder. Fiscal adequacy is therefore at the center of the model. We think, however, that adequacy of funding is merely the "presenting problem." In actual fact, the system that surrounds this problem is the culprit that threatens sustainability.[31] The culprit is *not* easily apprehended, however![32] The model shows fiscal adequacy interacting with practically all the other parts of the model, usually directly. And some of those parts (state policy context and economics) are shown as direct influences on "workable local size."

The underlying dilemma is the result of a system of economics, ideas, and professional practice that constitutes an agenda, which we might call the *factory system*. This system determines how the profession thinks about schooling, who conceives the purposes of schools, and *which mechanisms* enforce those purposes in the real world. Needless to say, local rural communities do not figure prominently in this agenda as beneficiaries and certainly not as decision makers. In sustaining a small rural high school, a superintendent is better off to engage this dilemma as the underlying cause of the funding problem than to merely tinker with the details of the technical problem of inadequate funding.

Now, let's consider the influences that surround fiscal adequacy in our hypothetical model. Please remember that these influences affect our sense of the impacts of economics, politics, and professional norms on the *presenting problem* of adequate funding for small rural high schools. These influences also affect each other. Together they constitute the system that we are trying to bring into focus.

Community focus, as the concept is used in this book, rests on "sense of place"—the shared experience of living and caring for a particular place. Such an experience is work for the mind as well as for the body; that's what makes it an appropriate center of attention for rural schools. While school professionals often refer to anything outside the school as "the community," the word as used here signals both something more and something less than the wide world in general. Community focus entails the representation (that is, the *conscious development* of a community's image) within the life of the school—not just in personal relationships but also in the program of study (curriculum) and teaching (pedagogy). Community focus in a school can persist with or without the stewardship of the superintendent, but it can hardly thrive without it. A "community" in our view cannot be an entire county or city of 50,000 or more residents. Small school size may thus exert an influence on community focus, a focus not indicated in figure 3, incidentally. A somewhat different figure would be required to suggest the relationships that explain community focus per se, that is, in terms of a community's own identity, cohesion, and integrity as distinct from the school's "community focus." In particular, such a figure might need to

include social capital, institutional infrastructure (schools, churches, hospitals, etc.), and local history and politics.

Stewardship aims at developing and guarding the common purposes that a school-community defines for itself (see chapter 8 for further discussion of this concept). It is, in short, a locally-oriented mission for superintendents, which they may take up or not. Although cultivating community focus can constitute stewardship, this work also involves reinforcing the community's sense of itself and its engagement with the school and district. The case study schools, for instance, all show considerable evidence of community focus, but the focus is qualitatively different in each instance.

Local economic conditions are part of the market conditions affecting schooling, but they are perhaps not the most determining part. Nonetheless, declining and stagnant economies inevitably have a negative effect on a community's ability to sustain a small high school, especially in the final stages of economic decay.

State policy context, which varies substantially from state to state, structures the opportunities that exist for small rural high schools. Regulations about curriculum, personnel, transportation, sports, standards, and accountability can combine to favor or weaken the sustainability of small rural high schools.

Fiscal adequacy—the center of our model—indicates the level of financial support available to maintain a school. It may be good or poor.

Workable local size translates the impacts of the system of influences into a lower limit of sustainable school size. Many combinations of influences can, and throughout the nation definitely do, continuously readjust this limit within states.

The model leaves out the influence of remote location. As noted previously, remote location alone is usually a compelling reason for keeping a very small high school open.

What the model shows. The model takes seriously the claim that fiscal inadequacy is the major impediment to the sustainability of small high schools. But it also tries to display the important interactions that

determine the minimum, workable high school size in a given locale. In particular, figure 3 shows

- the important role that stewardship (on the part of the superintendent) and community focus (a joint venture of community and school) play
- the inherently weak position of the superintendent with respect to the other influences
- the strong direct influence imposed by the state policy context and local economic conditions

The arrows in the model portray influences.[33] Two-headed arrows show two-way influences. Note the influence that stewardship and community focus have on one another. Preexisting community focus can elicit stewardship or stewardship can elicit community focus. Also, lack of community focus can undermine the prospects for stewardship, and vice versa. Similarly, local economic conditions can influence community focus, or community focus might influence local economic conditions. Of course, many influences well beyond the reach of the school have a much stronger influence on local economic conditions; for instance, a factory or mine closing.

In addition, the model shows an arrow from state policy context to the two-way arrow between stewardship and community focus. This suggests that state policy context influences the relationship between the superintendent and the community. It can substantially disrupt this relationship, and in some states it often does. The arrow linking the mutual relationship between stewardship and community focus to fiscal adequacy is intended to suggest an interactive influence on fiscal adequacy.[34]

The model also shows the direct effect of state policy context on stewardship, and suggests that the policy context can strengthen or weaken the likelihood that a superintendent will exercise stewardship.

The model also shows that superintendents occupy a weak position with respect to sustainability (workable local size). It suggests that community focus is the chief leverage point that superintendents have for improving fiscal adequacy. The improvement may be modest or marginal, but it can still make the difference between retaining and losing a small high school. It's a critical leverage point, according to the

superintendents interviewed for this chapter. Chapters 4-7 show how this leverage is exercised in the case-study schools. In all of the case studies, it seems that community focus is responsible for not only retaining the schools, but for sustaining and improving them, as well.

There are no miracles in the studies; just very hard work (see particularly the story of the superintendent in chapter 4). It's clear, however, that a superintendent who does not take up the mission of stewardship is not going to exercise this leverage. In some cases, remote location alone may allow a small high school to survive. In these cases, though, the superintendent may not have much interest in enlisting the community in school-improvement efforts, especially if the district operates other larger, more centrally-located high schools.[35]

Finally, the model acknowledges the strong influence of state policy and the local economy on both fiscal adequacy and the ultimate concern here—workable local size. The superintendent and the community combined (according to the model) exert one influence in three on fiscal adequacy, but they have a back-door influence through local economic conditions.[36] Readers should not forget that school districts are often the *largest* employer in an area, and they are almost always among the top employers in rural areas. If schools and districts achieve a community focus, they will probably find, like some of the case study schools, that they can enhance local economic vitality, or, like all of the case study schools, uncover prospects for such enhancements.

As a side note, figure 3 does not portray the effect of the "feedback loops" that dominate the behavior of complex systems. The phenomenon of feedback loops partly explains how systems appear to have lives of their own. The relationships illustrated in figure 3 evolve over time. Over time, influences reinforce one another, often in unforeseeable ways. Over time, influences that are initially quite small strengthen. They can strengthen to the point of dominating the behavior of an organization. These largely unforeseeable outcomes can be good or bad for the organization. Leadership that draws on and facilitates organizational synergy, according to dynamic systems theory, helps create productive and beneficial feedback loops. Old style command-and-control leadership is more likely to sponsor organizational stagnation or degeneration.

This last observation implies that a seemingly small but appropriate action can have a surprising long-term benefit for an organization. And an accumulation of such actions can, over time, markedly improve the sustainability of a small school.

Anything Else?

We left something out of the model. We might have put a two-headed arrow connecting stewardship and state policy context. This would have suggested that a stewardly superintendent could influence state policy for the better (or worse). Why not? Why didn't we include this possible relationship?

Sometimes individuals do influence state policy, but they usually do so in association with others, even when they appear to be acting alone. The model is intended to illustrate the relationships that prevail mostly at the district or community level, where superintendents and community leaders are most active.

So the missing action link has to do with an *association* of superintendents bent on local stewardship for their rural places. Such an association could work to influence various state policies that make life difficult for small rural high schools. The desired policy action could have a narrow focus (like tinkering with the funding formula in support of small, remote, rural schools) or it could be broader (like overhauling the regulations that apply to facilities and curriculum to make them more favorable to small-scale schooling). The association could work alone or it could join coalitions. In particular, the issues of size and adequacy clearly have wide appeal and could enable a coalition of rural and big-city interests.

Recently, a team of researchers from New York City's Bank Street College studied the performance of small schools (most newly established as part of an urban reform effort) in Chicago.[57] Beginning on page 67 of their report, recommendations address a similar audience to the one this chapter addresses in the section titled "Strategies for Sustaining Small Schools." The recommendations are surprisingly similar, as well (though not the same, as rural and urban circumstances differ). Here is that team's most salient observation about change. It should resonate with those of us concerned about small rural high schools:

> Any system . . . will have to confront the need to rethink and redesign major policies and common practices, since most of those principles were designed for larger schools. *To make a difference, any genuine change must provoke a larger change in the way the overall system does business.*[38]

This systemic change begins with the understanding that being small is a good choice. Start to realize the strengths of smallness. Next, target relationships in the local community of which you and your school are a part. This is where stewardship and productive synergy start.

Summary

This chapter, based partly on interviews with rural superintendents, identified major technical and systemic challenges for sustaining small rural high schools. The discussion recommended items for action by state policymakers, district leaders, and communities. But it also considered the more complex *system* responsible for threats to sustainability. In order to effectively lead the challenging mission of sustaining small rural high schools, superintendents should fully understand the relationships among the many influences that constitute the dilemma.

Notes

1. To help us get a grip on the real-life issues of helping small schools flourish, we conducted structured interviews with more than 25 superintendents (from seven states located in the West, South, Great Plains, and East). These superintendents either (1) led districts that currently operated small rural high schools like those described in chapters 4 through 7 or (2) had recently had to close such schools. This chapter draws on information from those interviews, during which we asked superintendents to nominate key challenges and solutions. We considered the nominations, and adopted most of them in part, placing them in a wider interpretive frame. We asked the superintendents for their stories to help us articulate the issues at hand and they responded enthusiastically. We are deeply grateful to them, and errors of judgment and interpretation are ours alone.

2. See, for example, D. Monk, "The Organization and Reorganization of Small Rural Schools," in *Rural Education: Issues and Practice*, ed. A. DeYoung (New York: Garland, 1991).

3. A state education agency (SEA) with 50 school districts confronts a more manageable supervisory task than one with 1,000 districts, all else equal—extremes that actually exist in the U.S. The same argument applies to schools organized within districts, of course. Large urban districts with many schools confront an extreme

supervisory challenge, often reflected in bureaucratic gridlock, administrative diseconomies of scale, and the burden of managing schools that may be too large to serve communities well.

4. G. Hattrup and B. Kleiner, "How to Establish Proper Span of Control for Managers," *Industrial Management* 35(6): 28-29 (1993).

5. For historical background, see, for instance, E. Cubberley, *Rural Life and Education: A Study of the Rural-School Problem as a Phase of the Rural-Life Problem* (New York: Houghton-Mifflin, 1915) ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 392 559. School and district consolidations were a linchpin in twentieth-century plans to improve the thoroughness and efficiency of schooling. Fifty percent of the U.S. population lived in rural areas in Cubberley's time.

6. Ironically, complaints from consortia of *rural* districts (where schools are about half the size of schools elsewhere) have usually precipitated the very lawsuits asking courts to ensure that states operate thorough and efficient systems.

7. "Dynamic systems theory" derives from natural science investigations of complexity and chaos. Margaret Wheatley, in *Leadership and the New Science: Learning About Organization From An Orderly Universe* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 1994), summarizes the contributions succinctly and accessibly. Peter Senge, in *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* (New York: Currency Doubleday, 1990), gives the application to business organizations (without, however, dwelling on the analogies to natural science that concern Wheatley). For both writers, the processes of complexity and chaos theory completely overturn twentieth century conventional wisdom about management and leadership. Some small schools and districts may now have the advantage of having already successfully withstood the conventional wisdom. Others will have developed an inferiority complex, however.

8. See Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, 290-301; and Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science*.

9. See, for example, R. Gibboney, *The Stone Trumpet: A Story of Practical School Reform, 1960-1990* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).

10. This is evident in some states more than others, as table 2 and figures 1 and 2 in chapter 1 seem to suggest. Our purpose, however, is not to attribute fault but to help encourage consideration of alternatives. The idea that bigger is better was a distinctly nineteenth- and twentieth-century notion, one that appeared quite early, achieved prominence with mass production, and, by 1970 or so, had begun to wane. British industrialist E. F. Schumacher, for instance, published his landmark book *Small Is Beautiful: Economics As If People Mattered* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973). About that time the postindustrial and postmodern views that began to appear then valued *flexibility* and *difference* as compared to the "Fordist" or "modernist" qualities of standardization and sameness. See, for example, D. Bell, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society: A Venture in Social Forecasting* (New York: Basic Books, 1973); S. Best and D. Kellner, *Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations* (New York: Guilford, 1991); and D. Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1989). Small schools and districts would seem to offer better opportunities to realize these postindustrial values than large schools.

11. We refer to these presenting problems as "technical" because of the way they are usually addressed, as technicalities to be dealt with as separate issues.

12. See C. Roellke, *Curriculum Adequacy and Quality in High Schools Enrolling Fewer Than 400 Pupils (9-12)* (ERIC Digest) (Charleston, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, 1996), ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 401 090.

13. Marty Strange addresses the related issues in *Family Farming: A New Economic Vision* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988). Other writers who have considered the economic and political dimension of these threats include O. Davidson, *Broken Heartland: The Rise of America's Rural Ghetto* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1996); W. Berry (see, for example, *Home Economics: Fourteen Essays* [San Francisco: North Point, 1984]); P. Gruchow, *Grass Roots: The Universe of Home* (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 1995); and D. Orr, *Earth in Mind: On Education, Environment, and the Human Prospect* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 1994). In addition, C. Howley, "The Rural Education Dilemma as Part of the Rural Dilemma: Rural Education and Economics," in *Rural Education: Issues and Practice*, ed. A. DeYoung (New York: Garland, 1991), has synthesized economic issues especially for rural educators. Outmigration and declining tax bases present rural schools with real problems, but the underlying problems have implications that are every bit as grave for large as for small rural schools. For a consideration of the role of technology, see R. Williams, *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), and *The Politics of Modernism* (London: Verso, 1989).

14. Compare T. Haas,"Why Reform Doesn't Apply: Creating A New Story About Education in Rural America," in *Rural Education: Issues and Practice*, ed. A. DeYoung (New York: Garland, 1991), for a cogent rural view of "new thinking."

15. See, for example, A. DeYoung, *The Death and Life of a Rural American High School: Farewell, Little Kanawha* (New York: Garland, 1995); and A. Peshkin, *The Imperfect Union: School Consolidation and Community Conflict* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

16. See, for example, P. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, on "mental models."

17. These superintendents tended to lead larger rural districts (2,000 or more students in grades K-12), with two or more high schools. In these cases, the smallest high school was viewed as too small, and the reason given for its continued existence was *remote location*.

18. See, for example, N. Friedkin and J. Necochea, "School System Size and Performance: A Contingency Perspective," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 10(3): 237-49 (1988).

19. Recall that all these superintendents operated (or had closed) high schools enrolling no more than 400 students.

20. J. Kleinfeld, G. McDiarmid, and D. Hagstrom, "Small Local High Schools Decrease Alaska Native Dropout Rates," *Journal of American Indian Education* 28(3): 24-30 (1989).

21. In the language of complexity and chaos theory, the sustainability might well be *deterministic* (that is, caused by the complex interaction of events) but *unpredictable* (that is, the constitution of causes would be unique in each case).

22. For an example, see Vermont Department of Education, *Report of the Small Schools Group* (Montpelier: Author, 1998), http://www.state.vt.us/educ/SSreport.htm, ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 426 830.

23. In local-control states (principally those with many districts, for instance, in the Midwest), superintendents are generally closer to the community than in other states (those with comparatively few school districts, for instance, in the South).

24. The case study reported in chapter 7 shows this dynamic in action, as a district failed in its effort to establish a charter school but reaped substantial benefits just from making the attempt. This school district encompasses disparate communities and constitutes the only institutional infrastructure in the area, but planning for the charter school helped bring the communities together.

25. This might mean designing an auditorium to seat some multiple of the student body (for example, school age youth comprise approximately 20 percent of the population). This design would reflect the school's intention to host community-wide events, including those not directly related to or sanctioned by the school or district.

26. The urban small schools movement does not enjoy this advantage; some reports suggest the difficulty of dealing with big-city district bureaucracies (see, for example, M. Klonsky, *Small Schools: The Numbers Tell a Story. A Review of Research and Current Experiences* (Chicago: Small Schools Workshop, 1995), ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 386 517.

27. R. Bickel and C. Howley, "The Influence of Scale on Student Performance: A Multi-Level Extension of the Matthew Principle," *Education Policy Analysis Archives,* 2000. (On-line serial) 8(22). http://olam.ed.asu.edu/epaa/v8n22/, reports on a study of Georgia schools and districts and finds that small schools in small districts showed substantially greater equity effects of achievement than other schools in three contrasting locales. C. Howley and H. Harmon, "K-12 Unit Schooling in Rural America: A First Description," *The Rural Educator* 22(1): 10-18 (2000), reports on a study of K-12 unit schools (all students under one roof), discovering that superintendents of unit schools that comprised their own district reported per-pupil expenditures that were on average *twice* as high as those reported by superintendents of districts that operated other schools. Most of the additional revenues were locally generated, and the communities were not reported to have been more wealthy than other communities.

28. If the maximum size of a high school were in the neighborhood of 300-500, and if it were agreed (an unlikely agreement, certainly!) that districts should ideally operate just one high school, then the maximum size of a school district might be about 1,500.

29. Haas, "Why Reform Doesn't Apply."

30. DeYoung, *The Life and Death of a Rural American High School.*

31. Indeed, under different economics, large school size could well be considered too costly. In L. Stiefel et al., "High School Size: Effects on Budgets and Performance in New York City," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 22(1): 27-39 (2000), and in P. Funk and J. Bailey, *Big Schools, Big Results: Nebraska High School Completion and Postsecondary Enrollment Rates by Size of School District* (Lincoln: Nebraska Alliance for Rural Education, 1999), reports show that large schools are no more costly than small schools when expenditures are measured as "cost per graduate" rather than as "expenditure per pupil." These researchers point out that if the lifetime benefits of high school graduation were also included in the calculation of educationally relevant costs, small schools would probably turn out to be less expensive than large schools. In other words, a different economics would yield a very different conclusion.

32. Tables 2 and 3 clearly show that de facto norms for workable high school size vary *tremendously* across the nation. If, indeed, a professional consensus about universally optimal size ever did exist, it is hardly evident in actual school practice or in the discourse of the superintendents with whom we talked. What actually exists on the ground is evidently the result of some quite complex *negotiations* with reality.

33. The relationship of influences is, of course, highly speculative. Various research methods (for example, path analysis) might test the model empirically. But we're not suggesting the need for such tests. In fact, if the model is complex and deterministic, additional work along the lines of "grounded theory" would be necessary to specify the model further, let alone to test it empirically. The model does reflect much of what we learned in study sites and from talking with the superintendents with whom we consulted for this chapter.

34. In other words, when the level of community focus on stewardship is out of sync (one high and the other low), the influence on fiscal adequacy will be negative. But when they are in sync (both high or both low), the influence would be neutral or positive. Think of this as showing the influence of the relationship between superintendent and community.

35. Compare to Harmon and Howley, "K-12 Unit Schooling in Rural America."

36. For many suggestions and insights about this leverage and how to use it, consult Bruce Miller's excellent series of related works: "Rural Distress and Survival: The School and the Importance of 'Community'," *Journal of Research in Rural Education* 9(2): 84-103 (1993); *The Role of Rural Schools in Community Development: Policy Issues and Implications* (Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 1995), ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 393 617; and, coauthored with K. Hahn, *Finding Their Own Place: Youth in Three Small Rural Communities Take Part in Instructive School-to-Work Experiences* (Charleston, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, 1997), ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 423 122.

37. See P. Wasley et al., *Small Schools, Great Strides: A Study of New Small Schools in Chicago* (New York: Bank Street College of Education, 2000).

38. Wasley, et al., 2000, *Small School, Great Strides*, 67.

CHAPTER 3

Studying Small Rural High Schools

CRAIG B. HOWLEY

The case studies that appear in this volume were conducted according to a design developed in the course of several meetings of the U.S. Department of Education's Laboratory Network Program, under the leadership of the Rural Specialty Area housed at the regional educational laboratory program at AEL, Inc. (Charleston, WV). Other regional educational laboratories involved were the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (Portland, OR), Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (Austin, TX), and Southeastern Regional Vision for Education (Greensboro, NC). We might have chosen other ways to study these schools, but we adopted a qualitative rather than quantitative approach. The nature of the topic, which focused on particular and differing rural schools, suggested to all those involved the case study method.[1]

The studies and this book are part of a wider ranging view of rural schools and communities that includes several shared perspectives and commitments. Because these perspectives and commitments helped shape the study design, it may be useful for readers to know some details about them.

The Overall Plan

The overall collaborative was predicated on five themes that served to organize its work: sense of place, unsettling of America, pathways to adulthood, small-scale organization, and policy challenges. Members of the collaborative agreed that the themes were sufficient to describe the range of issues of most pressing interest. The collaborative developed the following descriptions of the themes.

Sense of place. The case studies were conceived to address this theme. It involves the relationships to both natural and human environs that constitute local cultures, lifeways, and meanings. These matters we understood to be relevant to such concerns as (1) curriculum and instruction that uses or is based on community endeavors, (2) the character of rural schooling (as opposed to generic schooling merely enacted in rural places), (3) schooling *for* community, and (4) the contributions of diverse rural cultures to education.

Unsettling America. This theme addresses the *institutional outmigration* that has characterized the rural experience in the twentieth century and its implications for the future. Here the project dealt in part with: (1) school consolidation and reorganization, (2) the effects of school closure on communities (for example, social capital, economic life), (3) withdrawal of services and organizations from rural areas (for example, banks, hospitals, stores), and (4) recreating appropriate rural institutions and institutional purposes.

Pathways to adulthood. This theme addresses the successful coming of age and maturation of children and youth. Issues we believed to be relevant included: (1) curriculum breadth and depth, (2) rural youth seeking vocations, (3) schooling and rural livelihood, (4) systems of schooling, economic life, and community development, and (5) outmigration of rural youth.

Small-scale organization. This theme accords a special place to small schools. Indeed, small-scale organization characterizes rural social spaces most integrally, generally featuring small districts, schools, classes, churches, banks, and hospitals. Logical areas of interest in our view included: (1) school or district size and the varying levels of student performance or accomplishment, (2) school or district size and the idea of community, (3) models of humanly scaled institutions (especially

schools and school districts), (4) small schools' realization of the inherent advantages of small-scale organization, and (5) alternative organizational forms of small-scale schooling for rural areas.

Policy challenges. This theme is instrumental rather than inherent. Policy challenges may influence any of the other themes. We believed that the forces that have negatively influenced rural places in recent times are of such magnitude that a separate policy theme was necessary. We considered: (1) policy's role in facilitating or frustrating genuinely rural interests, (2) regional variations in policy challenges, (3) policy waivers needed to sustain the integrity of small rural schools, (4) public policy education appropriate for rural places, and (5) policy forums (most specifically to inform the work of this project).

These themes were intended to describe a range of overlapping concerns, with the fifth, "policy challenges," included to specifically address issues across all themes. Our discussion of the themes and how to address them across laboratory regions and audiences led us to consider developing a publication that would help others put the cases to practical use in the context of local, state, and national policy.

Thus, the idea for this book was conceived. Given our shared commitment to retain (protect from closure), maintain (ensure the functionality of), and sustain (support and develop) small rural high schools, we wanted to demonstrate what *flourishing* small rural high schools might look like.

To our knowledge, this story has never been told in a way that would help rural communities, state departments of education and legislators, and federal officials clearly see the trajectory that leads from retaining small rural high schools to ultimately sustaining them and helping them to flourish.

The project adopted the term *flourish* as an alternative to *excellence*. Given the foregoing "sense of place" theme, the team had some reservations about striving for cosmopolitan conceptions of excellence. As a group with much experience and background in rural schooling, we agreed that adopting "one-best" purposes or solutions generally fails rural communities and schools. At the same time, all of us ardently believed that rural schools must cultivate student learning and facility in using words and numbers because the work of understanding and improving rural communities requires such facility.

Too often some external factor is seen as the necessary and sufficient source of excellence in other places: either students are born into privilege or certain intervening schemes (such as standards or systemic reform) are thought to structure the pursuit of excellence. However, we agreed that sources of excellence are found in every community, and rural schools flourish when they are in touch with those sources.

Members of the research team also believe that outside support and ideas can be important to the success of rural school improvement efforts.[2] Our focus in these studies, however, was not to show how outside influences achieved excellence. Instead, it was to examine the possible sources of strength *within rural communities* that hypothetically helped these schools to individually flourish. The Rural School and Community Trust recently published another view, compatible with ours, of how rural communities might become more vigorously and productively involved in fashioning *locally appropriate educational standards.*[3]

Study Design

In extensive conversations about this work, our collaborative set the parameters of the study in terms of (1) conception and purpose, (2) terminology, (3) audiences and products, (4) study protocol, and (5) site selection criteria.

Through the studies we hoped to derive lessons from rural communities that have chosen to retain, maintain, and sustain small schools. We wanted to know how small, rural schools flourished. Such knowledge, we thought, would prove useful to other rural communities in their efforts to sustain small schools.

The relevant terms (retain, maintain, sustain, flourish) were applied to small rural schools that communities (1) *retained* by choice (that is, successfully defended against closure); (2) "kept up" (*maintained*) as a viable status quo, if not "improved;" (3) actively *sustained* as a healthy and educative institution; and (4) sustained to the degree that they *flourish* (for example, enhanced community well-being and student learning become notable in practical terms).

While we imagined a variety of ways to present these studies, our priority at the outset was the development of this book. We agreed, in large measure, that state policies have often facilitated the closure of

many small rural schools that might have been sustained. In some states, this circumstance almost always puts local boards of education and local superintendents in sharp conflict with communities. Yet figure 1 clearly shows that many states *do* sustain their small, rural high schools. While we have heard too often that this challenge is impossible to meet, we don't believe it and hope you won't either, once you have read the case studies.

The study protocol consisted of one overarching question, 11 focusing questions, and the specification that researchers use multiple data sources. In carrying out the case studies, we agreed that each research team would exercise the judgment necessary to pursue emergent lines of relevant inquiry on site. The overarching question and the focusing questions were designed to give participants a sense of the overall domain of the study, without precluding examination of the issues and themes that would characterize each school and community. Finally, the multiple sources of data requirement was intended to ensure internal validity within and across case studies and to further define the domain of the studies generally. .

The overarching question asked, "How is it that some rural communities retain, maintain, and sustain small high schools in the face of declining enrollments, increasing financial constraints, increasing demands for accountability, and in some regions, continuing efforts to create larger schools?" Chapter 8, in line with Robert Yin's advice to generalize from cases to theory, not to other cases, attempts to answer the overarching question.

The following 11 focusing questions helped us address the overarching question:

1. Why have these small rural high schools been retained?
2. When small rural high schools thus retained flourish, what do local circumstances (that is, economy, culture, civic life) and organizational elements (that is, school and district) contribute?
3. When small rural high schools thus sustained flourish, what are the contributions of state history, geography, politics, and education policy?

4. How are the challenges of small scale (for example, staffing, curriculum, technology, capital outlay, professional development) managed?
5. How does the issue of rural youth outmigration unfold differently and similarly in these schools?
6. Can any insights related to civil or social justice be inferred from the experience of these schools and communities?
7. Are there gender, ethnicity, or poverty issues?
8. How "place-based" is the school in establishing a rationale for survival (that is, perceived rationale for high school, need to keep kids in community, nature of local curriculum, residency of teachers)?
9. What local and external forces are involved in sustaining the school? Were local networks formed?
10. What other rallying points have there been for the community (for example, crime prevention, economic revitalization) and how did these activities impact the school?
11. What rural policy issues (primarily but not exclusively in education) do our findings raise?

To address these and related questions, each researcher engaged students, current and retired teachers, school board members, parents, school administrators, and residents. Such engagement took various forms. The AEL research team, for instance, gathered most of its data in structured interviews of one or two persons and in several focus groups (teachers, students, parents). Researchers also conducted unstructured interviews and spoke to citizens informally in stores and offices. In addition to engaging people, we also examined historical documents available locally.

We selected potential schools to study according to the following criteria:

- high school focus—any school with a 12th grade, including such configurations as K-12; 7-12, 9-12, and 10-12

- average enrollment in relevant grades of 100 or fewer—for example, 400 or fewer in grades 9-12 in a K-12, 7-12, or 9-12 school and 300 or fewer in a 10-12 school
- Common Core of Data school locale codes of 7 (rural) or 6 (small town), with assurance from the participating research team that any locale 6 site was not suburban
- community population base that is stable or declining— that is, no boom towns and no places rapidly losing their rural character

With these criteria specified, each team was allowed to choose the study school based on its familiarity with the schools in its region.

Making the Visits

None of us had any difficulty arranging interviews or meeting local community leaders and other citizens. Those with whom we spoke were frank, friendly, and often humorous as they discussed the dilemmas and contradictions of rural life. Often they were passionate in their commitments and appreciation of their places. Visits lasted several days. Additional contacts took place thereafter as necessary or convenient.

All visits were conducted between November 1997 and November 1998, as the schedules of the various researchers permitted. While conditions have changed somewhat in the schools and districts studied, we have kept the reports in their original form. The chapters have been reviewed by the current superintendents of the districts.

What the Studies Are and Aren't

While effective case studies should exhibit many of the characteristics of good journalism or even good literature, the purpose of our stories is not to report the news as journalists do, or to evoke an emotional "sense and sensibility" as novelists might.[4] Rather, our four stories form a mosaic of the conditions that may exist in flourishing small rural high schools around the country. They are also by no means ethnographic. They are not definitive. Team members visited these places, but they did not live in them for extended periods to gather information as participant observers.

In our minds, the news in these stories, beyond the interesting details of community life, consists of the implications for practice and theory to be drawn from each of the four cases. We give this news in chapter 8, while chapters 1 and 2 contextualize it for practice and policymaking.

At the same time, we want to uphold the attachment that people in all four study sites held for their schools, their communities, and the land that holds them. Many rural schools advocates believe that cultivating and more justly realizing this attachment should become the most important project of rural schooling.[5]

In many places, professional educators have dismissed this attachment as irrational or sentimental. We have taken a different view. We agree with the many writers who think that a rural education that is true to itself aims to cultivate respect for and commitment to local places—a guiding principle that is ultimately founded on both affection and reason.[6] In some ways the intent of this project, then, does resemble the novelist's, but neither our method nor the places we visited are fictional. These issues and ideas, we know from our work with rural schools, are too seldom unpacked, reflected upon, and finally understood and acted upon.

One final caveat about editorial presentation is necessary. It's often said that in qualitative research "the researcher is the data collection instrument." In fact, the researcher is also the data analysis instrument and, most critically, the voice of the study. Starting from a common protocol and some common commitments, the four case studies naturally diverge in matters of analysis, interpretation, and voice. They are different stories, differently authored, and differently understood. We have tried to preserve rather than obscure these authentic differences. We believed we would be overstepping our authority in imposing a single voice on all studies. Commonalities, however, are suggested in the opening chapters and explicitly considered in the closing chapter.

Notes

1. See, for example, R. Stake, *The Art of Case Study Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1995); and R. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 2d ed., Applied Social Research Methods Series, vol. 5 (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994).

2. The case studies in chapters 4 through 7 clearly show that such support is important and even essential. The studies also suggest that such support works best when those who need it seek it or engineer it themselves in ways that suit local circumstances.

3. Rural Challenge Policy Program, *An Invitation to Discuss Standards: A Policy Statement of the Rural Challenge* (Randolph, VT: The Rural Challenge Policy Program, 1999).

4. Stake, *The Art of Case Study Research*.

5. T. Haas and P. Nachtigal, *Place Value: An Educator's Guide to Good Literature on Rural Lifeways, Environments, and Purposes of Education* (Charleston, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, 1998). ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 420 464; W. Jackson, *Becoming Native to This Place* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1994); D. Orr, *Earth in Mind: On Education, Environment, and the Human Prospect* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 1994); and P. Theobald, *Teaching the Commons: Place, Pride, and the Renewal of Community* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1997).

6. See Haas and Nachtigal, *Place Value*, for a fine guide to this excellent literature.

CHAPTER 4

Community as Tacit Curriculum: A Case Study of Oneida High School, Oneida, Tennessee

CRAIG B. HOWLEY AND HOBART L. HARMON[1]

Three researchers from the Appalachia Educational Laboratory visited the Oneida Special School District (OSSD) in Oneida, Tennessee, in December 1997. During the visit, we met with over 70 individuals. The meetings took the form of structured interviews, with questions based on the master protocol developed for the overall LNP project. Three of our meetings were conducted as focus groups with up to 15 participants. We also held informal conversations with local citizens ("person in the street" encounters). We talked to teachers (current and retired), administrators (current and retired), athletic directors, school staff (cafeteria manager, custodian, secretary), school board members (current and retired), business owners, working people, civic leaders and officials, newspaper editors, labor leaders, ministers, social service workers, and youth leaders.

From these sources, we assembled data that support the story that follows. Though intense, our visit was nonetheless short; many interesting issues that would intrigue a rural school ethnographer could not be examined.[2] Our purposes (as described in the previous chapter) were more limited. Thus, we have a particular story to tell, or rather the convergence of many individual remarks to interpret, in relaying the story of Oneida High School in Scott County, Tennessee.

Our story is not a parable. We do not insist on telling it to convey any lessons about how to replicate the OSSD success. Indeed, we suspect that the real lesson is negative; *not* in the sense that OSSD presents a poor example—by no means! The state of the district seemed, in fact, miraculous to us, particularly in light of our collective experiences with school districts in central Appalachia.

Still, it is the "miraculous" quality that constitutes the negative lesson. We mean that policymakers should not *expect* to replicate a miracle. Oneida is what it is by virtue of the way in which it strives to be true to itself. How a community might "replicate" the success of Oneida's struggle to do that is not even a question to pose without asking if the community holds dear the things that Oneida does, and if the community has anything akin to the resources with which that poor, rural community is so blessed. It also is important to keep in mind that success is cumulative—and temporary.

Instead of replicating miracles, wise policy would facilitate the conditions to achieve *different* miracles. The results of this approach to policy are not possible to guarantee. But it is important for policymakers to note that the kinds of policies that *do* aim at certainty generally fall short of promises, and usually *well short* of the promises initially made for them.

Oneida, then, presents a unique story, and its "lessons" for the rest of the world should not be overdrawn. We begin the story by describing the heart of the matter.

The Heart of the Matter

Time and again we asked our hosts to tell us how the community was included in the curriculum of Oneida High School in the Oneida Special School District (OSSD). We were curious about the issue because of our conviction that actual living communities ought somehow to constitute the core purposes of schooling.[3] We were not looking for any particular response, nor did we have a critical sense of what might constitute better or worse answers in Scott County. Indeed, we weren't there to pass judgment.

The answer we got was a familiar one: guest speakers, field trips, and local oral traditions. Many schools are doing these sorts of things. The answer was, in essence, an admission that *within the formal curricu-*

lum, study of and student engagement in the community was not unusually strong. Yet, over the course of our visit, our hosts rephrased and answered our question on different terms—*their own terms*. Their own answer to their own implicit question (perhaps, "What do we owe our children and why?") suggested that the schooling experienced by high school kids in the OSSD put community very much at the heart of the enterprise.

We use the word "*heart*" to indicate an affectionate disposition; that is, an attachment to the city of Oneida and to Scott County, Tennessee, that was widespread among those with whom we spoke. This disposition has much to do with the continuing survival of the district and its high school, the particularity of its place in north central Tennessee, and the contradictory political economic circumstance of the community as it confronts the coming decades. We shall describe this attachment later on, but first let's place the town of Oneida in the context of Scott County and Tennessee.

Oneida in Scott County and Tennessee

Scott County must be one of the most historically unusual counties in the United States. Original settlers were veterans of the American Revolution who were awarded grants of land on the Cumberland Plateau as reward for their service. The names of these families are noted on a historical plaque in Huntsville, the county seat. Several local residents and educators with whom we met bore these family names. This detail is not quite so unusual as the remarkable fact that when the Civil War erupted and Tennessee seceded from the Union, the leaders of Scott County acted to secede from Tennessee!

According to a member of the local historical society, the county sent about 300 recruits north to join the Union army and about 60 recruits south to join the Confederate army. Since then, Scott County has been a Republican county (though voter rolls are now about evenly split between Republicans and Democrats, according to those with whom we spoke). Both newspapers remain Republican. "In fact," said one informant, "Scott County should have been in Kentucky." This comment alluded to the early surveying error that set the Tennessee state border 10 minutes further north than ordered. The town of Oneida is itself divided by the intended parallel of 36°30'.[4]

Perhaps this history accounts in some strange measure for the special status of the Oneida school district. The first "high school" in Scott County was established in Oneida, the center of population, in 1901. The building that housed the school had three rooms in which all grades, including high school, were taught. According to the local historian of Scott County, this building had opened its doors in 1859 on Main Street,

> But this old two-story structure was torn down [sometime] a new, two-room one built on the same grounds . . . [and] soon a third room was added. . . . It was the first home of Oneida High School. From 1901 to 1920 the high school curriculum was taught there, and the pupils went as far in it as there were courses offered.[5]

In 1915, Oneida educators succeeded in having a bill passed in the state senate that established an independent school district, "The Oneida High School of Scott County." Despite the fact that the *high school* was the focus of Senate Bill 1064, the town continued to operate a combined K-12 school and constructed a new building for it in 1920. In 1924, however, Oneida erected a separate high school building. This construction was followed by additions to both the elementary school and high school in 1931. Fire destroyed the elementary school in 1944. New structures were built in 1948 and 1962. The present high school building is of very recent construction.

From 1915 onward, the district opened its enrollment to eligible students across all of Scott County.[6] Funding is apportioned to the schools of Scott County through the county commission on a per pupil basis. The residents of the district also tax themselves additionally to support the district, a measure permissible under Tennessee laws and the laws of virtually all states. Again, Oneida is the center of economic life in Scott County. Yet, far from being affluent by national standards, the town, as well as the county, would be classified conversely as impoverished.[7]

The local structure of poverty. According to the 1990 decennial census, about 10 percent of families in the town of Oneida (and the county of Scott, as well) had a median family income of less than half the poverty level, and about 30 percent in both the town and the county were living at or below the poverty level. At the same time, about 47

percent of the population in Oneida town, as compared to about 36 percent of those in the county (minus the town), enjoyed family incomes at least twice that which defines the poverty line. This modest difference in income between a rural town and the surrounding rural countryside is common throughout rural America, though the gap is probably more extreme in many places.

The special circumstance of the OSSD within Scott County, however, probably tends to sharpen the natural economic distinctions prevailing between town and country. Relatively speaking, the OSSD operates in a somewhat less pinched context than does the Scott County School District (SCSD) which surrounds it. There is little difference in the percentages of enrolled children living in poverty—32 percent for the OSSD and 34 percent for the SCSD. The difference is more noticeable in terms of median incomes of families with children—about $23,000 for families living within the OSSD boundaries and $19,000 for families in the SCSD. The differences seem more dramatic still in terms of educational attainment. Among those living in the town of Oneida in 1990, about 45 percent of adults over age 25 had fewer than 12 years of schooling; for Scott County, it was about 55 percent. And, in Oneida, more than 15 percent of adults possessed at least a bachelor's degree. In the county, it was less than 5 percent. This proportion of college-educated adults puts Oneida in the 80th percentile of Tennessee districts, whereas 5 percent put the county at about the 10th percentile. The difference in educational attainment is therefore more dramatic than it seems at first blush.[8]

The data seem to support what we heard from those we interviewed—that Oneida is the economic and entrepreneurial hub of the county.[9] The data suggest that years before the events about which we heard from local people, the OSSD probably benefitted from a tradition of engagement with its schools. The retired teachers, in fact, confirmed this in our talk with them. The local historian characterized the educators who initiated the OSSD in 1915 as "farsighted."[10] The long-term popular influence of a strong local middle class is part of the legacy of other Appalachian rural towns.[11] Oneida appears to have been more fortunate than some, and that good fortune is surely part of the story of its successful high school. It is important to keep in mind that we are talking about the sort of modest good fortune which enables a

community to make the most of the things and relationships at hand, rather than dramatic windfalls.

The Crisis and the Restructuring of Local Leadership

"The world moves on." This was the classic message of Heraclitus, the Greek philosopher who wrote before Plato. Heraclitus observed that no one could "step twice into the same river." The river (a metaphor for the world), flowed on and changed always. Not everyone has agreed with Heraclitus that change is the one constant in life, but for rural U. S. communities in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it has been extraordinarily difficult to see the constants of rural life (closeness to kin, wildness, and community itself) for the perpetual and disrupting changes.

As in many rural places, economic crisis is a regular visitor to Scott County. Like many rural Appalachian places, Scott County's economic history includes coal mining, as well as timber and oil and gas. First it was deep mines, then strip mines. By 1980, the mines were largely inactive and remain so today. The population in 1997 finally surpassed the 1980 figure, and, according to those we interviewed, the adjustment to a restructured economy has been difficult.

Though difficult, it has been done. Elsewhere in Appalachia, the adjustment has not been made. For example, in McDowell County, West Virginia, perhaps *the* major coal county in that state, the population declined 40 percent from 1980 to 1990 and an additional 13 percent from 1990 to 1997. The population in Scott County, by contrast, increased an estimated 7.8 percent from 1990 to 1997, about 3/7 from natural increase and the remainder from in-migration. Out-migration is no longer a phenomenon in Scott County, though it nevertheless remains a constant concern among those with whom we spoke.

The school crisis. Crises in local economies precipitate other crises: personal, familial, and organizational. For a time it seemed that the OSSD would not survive. According to one of our sources, part of the crisis that for a time threatened the continued existence of the district arose from the removal of a popular principal who was "demoted" to teacher status by a previous superintendent. This controversy was widely engaged by citizens, the newspaper, and educators. The commu-

nity, as in many such cases, was divided over the issue and considerable rancor persisted. The superintendency changed as a result.

The rancor put the continued existence of the OSSD into jeopardy as a number of issues could not be addressed due to the divisiveness. Our sources variously reported these issues to be the poor condition of school buildings, mediocre performance of sports teams, declining academic standards, low test scores, and poor staff morale. These are not uncommon challenges for schools, but the community perceived that these issues placed the continued existence of this independent district in jeopardy.[12] We did not ask the state department of education if the reported fears were justified, but the unusual response of the community (described next) substantiated the notion that the community was seriously worried.

The response. Whether the response began as a grassroots effort or as an organized call by the town's leaders is unclear. We would hazard the guess that the two efforts were, in any case, compatible. Initially, grassroots fund-raising efforts (bake sales, raffles, and so forth) were very lucrative events, raising *several hundred thousand* dollars intended merely to keep the schools operating. Town and district leaders also focused on securing the patronage of affluent benefactors. This campaign was led by the longtime owner of a local factory who actively recruited other donors. The prospective benefactors needed to be convinced that their patronage would not be given in vain. The success of the grassroots fund-raising ventures partly convinced the prospective donors. The commitment to finding, and, perhaps more importantly, to formally evaluating a new superintendent provided the rest of the successful argument to the donors. This process of evaluation entailed hiring the prospective superintendent to be the facilitator for the already-underway, locally-sponsored school improvement project.

The new OSSD leader. Mayfield Brown, the prospective new superintendent, arrived in the OSSD in the role of superintendent's helpmate. But he soon realized that his was a temporary role leading to the superintendency. A generous benefactor had promised support to the OSSD for 10 years at half a million dollars per year, with half of the funding contingent on improved academic results.

Brown is hardly a figure that urban educators would recognize. Not only is he a local native, but his family has held superintendencies for

generations. And in Tennessee, the superintendencies, until very recently, have been partisan *elected* positions. It is important to understand that Brown was not a resident of Oneida or even Scott County. He came from a nearby county. This gave him the happy circumstance of being an outsider (in that his connections to Oneida were not intense) and an insider (in that he knew well how things worked in places like Oneida). Furthermore, he came to a system that not only wanted to see improvement, but had secured independent funding to do it. Brown was, in fact, personally recruited to this mission by a former governor and high-ranking federal official whom he knew.

One of his first actions was to send a letter to the pastors of all 86 churches in Scott County (remember, the OSSD is open to all children in the county) asking them to pray for the success of the Oneida construction program. In his interview with us, he chuckled at the notion that the Lord had ensured his success, but at the same time it seemed that he appreciated the complex irony—personal and professional—of such an assertion.

The new leader's vision of a good school. Recent school improvement literature stresses the importance of a shared vision for the future. We therefore asked nearly everyone we talked with what they considered to be a good school. The answer we received from Brown was unique. He told us that the OSSD school board had asked him that question, and he refused to answer them. He said he thought that the community ought to provide the answer, and that his role should be to help them. Others described Brown as a listener, a thinker, a networker. To this day, he says, he frequents three coffee shops every morning, as each one caters to a unique section of the community.

Nonetheless, Brown told us what he is now working towards at OSSD.[13] He aims to create the kind of educational system that would be acceptable to managerial workers from the outside; that is, to people in the national culture. This is an unusual goal to set alongside that of maintaining respect for the local community.

Evidence of What the Local Community Expects

Brown was phrasing his aims carefully when he used the word *acceptable*. He seemed to suggest the possibility of creating a system sufficiently cosmopolitan to satisfy newcomers, but not to the extent

that it violated local commitments and assumptions. The new buildings are very attractive, friendly places that suburban or rural communities anywhere would find pleasing. The high school program includes an increasing number of advanced placement courses, and there is a clear emphasis on preparation for college, though a minority of students are preparing to go directly to work after high school. Some of those we interviewed candidly told us that they thought the high school placed too great an emphasis on college preparation. But this standard is, in a sense, a legacy of the "special" quality of the OSSD. At the focus group we held for parents, a participant noted,

> I think tradition has a lot to do with [Oneida High School flourishing]. . . . It goes back years and years . . . wanting the best and doing the best . . . They hire the best [teachers and administrators] . . . because tradition comes down through uncles, grandparents, great-grandparents, [people who] went to school here, and they're still here, and [now] their grandchildren or their nephews or their own children are going [to Oneida High School].

Another parent said,

> It's always flourished. I mean, I was raised here. I graduated [from] Oneida. My parents were raised here, and both graduated from Oneida. It's always been a status that if you wanted to do education, you hauled your kids to get them into Oneida.

In a sense, the OSSD has served Scott County as a rural school (district) of choice. *No one* with whom we spoke *ever* articulated the viewpoint that the SCSD (the county system) was an inferior system. Always, instead, they cited the positive attributes of the OSSD—smaller size, pride of the community, tradition of excellence. It is significant that the OSSD provides very little transportation. The district of about 1,200 students owns just three school buses. Most parents "haul" their kids back and forth to school. No one with whom we spoke complained of the lack of bus service, and several insisted that parents *ought* to provide transportation. More tacitly, we suspect, parents trade bus transport for a modicum of school choice. This may be especially true for the 60 percent of families who live outside the OSSD boundaries.[14]

The significance of current demographics is underscored by the following remark, also made by a parent in the focus group:

> Oneida has consistently elected responsible board members who are educated . . . and interested in education. That's not true in many rural areas. . . . Oneida has always put forth first-class board members that have always been interested primarily in education.

The parents in the focus group meeting and elsewhere shared a sense of the unique circumstances that brought the OSSD into being. They also agreed with the assessment of the local historian that the "farsighted" character of those who established the district was a point of community pride among citizens.[15] In some sense, Oneida has *inherited* exactly the vision that Mayfield Brown now articulates. It includes a shared evaluation of the relationship of the strong future to the past.

We easily concluded that the OSSD, and particularly its high school, though small, would be acceptable to a national clientele. Smallness, if associated with an adequate college-prep curriculum and attractive facilities, is seen as a distinct asset to parents aware of recent thinking about the virtues of small-scale schooling.[16]

The other side of the ledger, though, concerns the nature of the community as it imagines the school and holds palpable expectations of it. In our focus group with parents, we received a rapid stream of answers when we asked, "What is a good teacher? What do you want to see in a teacher?" These were the responses in the order they were offered

1. good morals
2. someone who can build, rather than tear down, character
3. someone who loves kids
4. responsible
5. ability to teach (some laughter that this was mentioned fifth)
6. we prefer married teachers
7. happy because they're here in Oneida
8. motivators
9. love their jobs

10. try new teaching ideas
11. participators (games, booster, volunteers)
12. someone who goes to church with us
13. if *we* hurt, we want *them* to hurt, too

These responses suggest to us a pattern of commitments that might characterize healthy small towns in many parts of rural America. Many of the statements reflect a traditional outlook that is hardly supportable any longer in cosmopolitan suburbs or big city districts. It seemed to us that the educators we interviewed understood and embraced these qualities.

Though they clearly thought it was important, citizens did *not* put academic achievement above all else. Something intangible—call it character, or being the kind of person who "gives back," or who is *domestic*— was what they prized.[17] Expertise, aggressiveness, and professionalism did not figure prominently in the language of those who spoke with us. They appreciated talent, entrepreneurial outlook, and having a trade or skill that could contribute to the community. Citizens also thought good sports teams affirmed and provided cause to celebrate this sense of the life-world.[18]

Despite the care taken to create a recognizably good school acceptable to well-educated outsiders, the school itself seemed to have a function that overshadowed its academic mission. As we heard it from many people, the school *should* prepare, and *was* preparing, students to live in the community and to imagine the good of the community. By community they meant principally the town of Oneida and its environs, but also, to some extent, Scott County, the region of the Cumberland Plateau, and Tennessee generally. We heard but scant mention of national or "global" purposes.

One of the researchers asked a "probe" question during a focus group. He asked what the town needed from its high school and what the state of Tennessee needed, and if there was a difference. Many people said that both the town and the state needed an excellent school. One person elaborated this viewpoint rather poignantly as follows:

> I think Tennessee needs a lot and Oneida needs a lot. . . . A big key, I think, is that we want those kids to go on to college or whatever they're doing [after high school] and *get their vocations* and we want them to

> come back to Oneida. We don't want them to go to Nashville or Memphis or New York. We want them to come back to Oneida and live and be productive here! And I think that's what the state needs. We don't need our graduates going somewhere else. We need them staying in the state to benefit where they live. But Oneida needs to . . . keep moving forward and then bring opportunities for our students to be able to come back home.

From this vantage, the acceptability issue (imagining a local school that is "acceptable" to an outside managerial class) concerns the *explicit* preparation of young people both to leave and then to return (see "Life in the School" for students' views of this issue). This possibility has been raised by a number of writers on rural education, as well as the Rural School and Community Trust,[19] and the adults in Oneida (both parents and educators) seem to be telling this story consistently to high school students. The entrepreneurial legacy in Oneida seems to offer real opportunities for the voluntary return of well-schooled youngsters. Because there are numerous businesses (nearly 300 in Scott County), a return is not a vague aspiration, but a distinct possibility. Among the Oneida citizens with whom we talked, the appeal and the likelihood of such a return is enhanced, rather than subverted, by a suitable postsecondary experience.

The bigger picture that citizens have in view encompasses the economic life of the town and the way schooling links the generations and the community together. A faith in the potential of this unbroken circle is likely grounded in the Christian practices of those 86 churches in the county. Hearty approval greeted the following remark at the parent focus group meeting:

> I think another positive is the kids are still allowed to acknowledge God as God and not some myth, and they're allowed to worship God in their own way without being ridiculed.

This view is pervasive and resilient in Appalachia, and, doubtless, throughout much of rural America. However, it is not necessarily, to our minds, a mark of religious bigotry or intolerance. By law, state education agencies impose religious neutrality on schools.

At the local level in many places (and not just rural places), such neutrality almost always turns out to be a troublesome principle. In

those places where the faithful strongly adhere to one sect, that faith will surely be represented in the upbringing of children, especially outside the school, but inevitably within it as well, subtly or openly. Such a conclusion is only *logical.*[20] We would be saddened to learn that Jewish or Islamic newcomers received anything but a courteous (if guarded!) welcome from citizens in Oneida. We'd be dumbfounded, though, to hear that OSSD parents and educators abandoned the Christian character of their community as a result of the presence of a few people of other faiths, because that conclusion would be patently *illogical.*

Neutrality is intended to help assure tolerance, but neutrality is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition of tolerance (or of enthusiastic welcome, for that matter). It's important, for instance, to realize that intolerance among Christian sects of different stripes has a very long history. Sectarianism in the United States, in particular, has been characterized as "rampant" by renowned historians.[21] In view of these facts, we suspect that a large degree of religious tolerance—perhaps a kind of ecumenical non-denominationalism—pervades social and business life in Scott County, Tennessee, where so many churches of differing views already exist.

Both parents and high school students told us that Oneida was a close-knit community. Adults and students alike claimed that the adults watched out for each others' children. Each group realized the possible liabilities of such scrutiny, though the students were perhaps the most conscious of the liabilities. The parents believed that the community's watchful eye substantially outweighed the liabilities.

It seemed to us that the OSSD operated a high school that would be *acceptable* to the outside world, while it simultaneously cultivated one that implemented the traditional commitments of the locality. We doubt that either the superintendent or the community would be disposed to take dramatic steps toward remaking the town or the county merely for it to become maximally *attractive* (not just "acceptable") to the outside world. They seemed to imagine a process of incremental adjustment, not transformative or revolutionary change. Nearly everyone with whom we spoke felt the town and the county and their setting on the Cumberland Plateau possessed a particular and enduring character that they sought to preserve throughout the process of growth and change. They considered their home a place they loved and wanted to be in, despite its challenges and out-of-the-way location.

Life in the School

Oneida High School enrolled 340 students in the 1997-98 academic year, with about 85 students in each class. The teaching staff in 1995 (the most recent year for which these data are available) comprised 24 teachers (full-time equivalencies), and the student to teacher ratio was 15 to 1. In 1997, all but two students were White, a common demographic presentation in rural Appalachia. The National Center for Education Statistics classifies Oneida as a "small town."[23] To qualify for this study, researchers agreed to include small-town schools only if they were not suburban schools. Oneida High School is clearly not a suburban school, but a school located in a small town serving a surrounding rural area. Knoxville, the nearest city, is about 90 minutes to two hours away.

As we did with the parents, we sponsored a focus group for about 15 high school students. Students came from all four grade levels and a variety of family backgrounds. A very slight majority expressed aspirations that would suggest they were college-prep students. Since most students proceed after graduation to a postsecondary setting, the group was probably somewhat representative of the school as a whole; though, of course, the focus group technique neither aims at nor requires such representativeness.

School size. Students in our focus group shared many opinions, but had to be continuously reminded that we were not seeking consensus but a variety of viewpoints from individuals. Many participants reiterated the view that the best thing about Oneida High School was its small size, which afforded an intimate and caring school climate. Two students who had attended larger schools contrasted their previous experiences with their more substantially positive experiences at Oneida.

At the same time, small size was perceived as a liability by most of these students, because they felt the outside world found it difficult to credit the accomplishments of the students and the school. According to one student, "They just don't think we're as good as they are." Another student added, "The only time we ever get any publicity is when something bad happens around here." This comment was in reference to the recent tragic death of a popular football coach. This remark startled us because we understood the local media to be attentive

and solicitous. The students, it turned out, were referring to attention in the *Knoxville* media.

The outside world. This interchange suggested to us that the outside world served the students to some extent as a kind of gauge of their importance or validity. The students did not articulate or probably understand this position and its complexity as well as parents did. This view of the outside world would seem to hold that although the most important reality and work are focused inside the community, the respect of the outside world for Oneida is not only desirable but *due*. Parents and high school students clearly believe that Oneida is "holding its own"—thriving in the face of evident challenges.

There is a tension in this perspective for young people, whose actual experience of an outside world is entirely theoretical. And yet the parents' hopes that their children would find a vocation in the outside world that would help them return to Scott County and Oneida were clearly reflected in students' longing to experience life beyond the Cumberland Plateau. Two students put it this way:

> [Student 1] Because I love this school and I've been other places when I've had the chance to go . . . and I know how they are. I think a lot [of the expressed desire to leave Scott County] is curiosity; or maybe people just want to rebel. . . .
>
> [Student 2] I think that's what the general consensus is. Most of my friends, they want to get out and see what else is out there, because if you've lived in Scott County all your life, it's unbelievable what goes on out in the real world, and most of them want to get out and see what's going on and then they'll appreciate [life in Oneida].

Students, unlike their parents, tend both to take the world that is in front of them *too* seriously ("this too shall pass" is not a youthful sentiment) and *not seriously enough*. "The real world," as expressed by student 2, lies somewhere over the horizon. The adults with whom we spoke hold a more complex view, though for them, the local community figured perhaps as the most "real" world. And this was a view they clearly wanted to see the school cultivate in the children of the community. Another student elaborated on the preceding observations as follows:

> Well, it's like if you do well in school here and like you go off to college, *people usually come back and get jobs here*. So it like makes our community better because we have better jobs and more opportunities and more educated people here. So it like all comes back to *you need to come back to this community and become a member of it* [emphases added].

What school is for. When we asked students what constituted a good school, we received opinions that were as definite as those that parents expressed about good teachers:

1. prepares you for life
2. not just academics, but extracurricular stuff
3. teaches you how to be a good citizen
4. a school that shows you that you can excel
5. a school that's willing to help you through life
6. a school that you don't have to worry something bad is going to happen
7. it's real community involved

The students, at least in this discussion, focused even more than the parents on the role of school as somehow suiting them for life. If academics are important, they are important mostly in an instrumental mode; that is, knowledge as a means and not an end in itself. This sequence of student remarks, however, may be inaccurately interpreted in isolation, since so much of students' time and effort actually is devoted to academic tasks and academic classes. Students' remarks proceeded associatively rather than linearly, and, in fact, it became clear from their associative remarks that they relied on teachers and coaches to nurture their academic performance.[24] From numerous reports, it seemed clear that academics constituted the core visible work of school, and that students, parents, and teachers regarded academic accomplishment as a higher priority than athletics or band. However, both academics and sports were seen as contributing to a larger purpose. That larger purpose might be understood as "the good life" (in classical terms), or "the glory of God" (in Christian terms), or "the community" (in contemporary secular terms). The complexity of these interlocking purposes seemed evident to practically all the adults with whom we

spoke; the students' appreciation was more tentative and tacit, but clearly developing.

The principal. The students were vocal in their appreciation and admiration of the high school principal, Coach Harper.[25] They clearly seemed to credit the principal for making Oneida a good school. One student, who was undecided about what to do after high school, opened this phase of the conversation this way:

> The principal is really involved. He tries to get you into stuff that maybe you don't want to do but he wants you into for your own good.

Another student reported this anecdote:

> One time we was coming down for a football game and we had . . . to put up a fence so people wouldn't try to sneak in. And he was down there doing it himself. He wasn't letting janitors do it . . . and then we got there [to help, we infer]. He worked so hard, it's unbelievable.

There was more praise about Coach Harper—how he spoke easily with all students, how he was not supercilious or remote, and how, when he meted out punishment, he also talked out the incident with the students involved. One student summed up,

> He watches out for all of us. When something bad happens, he's always right there. He tries to make sure that all of us—I mean, he doesn't pick favorites . . . not with the popular kids or the smart kids or anything. *He's there for all of us* [emphasis added].

Really bad things. One of our probes, prompted by the remark just quoted, challenged the students to tell us what sort of bad things might happen to someone at Oneida High School. The responses, to our surprise, did *not* focus on events in the lives of students. We might have expected to hear about students getting in trouble or having the usual adolescent crises, but in this conversation, those themes did not appear. Instead, what the students spoke of were the deaths or other losses of people dear to them, both in the community and the school. This train of reflections may have been the result of an unusual year, but the diverse students in this group seemed to us remarkably concerned with others and remarkably unconcerned with themselves. Meeting inevitable and unavoidable threats together has often been cited as one of the

hallmarks of genuine community.[26] One student referenced that perception this way:

> It's been one thing after another this year, and I think we're really a lot closer than we were. I mean it's sad to say that it took that, but everybody pulled together.

Work Lives of Teachers

Eight teachers (or 33 percent of the faculty) spoke to us in a focus group held at the end of the day in the school library. A few participants left and a few joined late, as their need to conduct after-school activities required.

When asked, about half the participants identified themselves as coming from families with educators, and perhaps a third readily affirmed that they came from "families of educators." All the teachers but one in the focus group were natives of Scott County or the town of Oneida. The single exception was a teacher who grew up in the neighboring county. "We're here by choice," said one of the participants.[27]

The teachers reiterated many of the themes raised by parents and students—the importance of community, leaving and returning, caring and nurturing. The teachers reported not only that they nurtured the students and one another, but that the students extended caring back to them. This remark was made in specific reference to the death of a popular and influential teacher, Coach May. According to one teacher, "There was a lot of pull together on both ends. They supported us as well as our supporting them through that time."

Academics and sports. The teachers, as might be expected, claimed that academics were a priority in their work. They also, however, grasped the ambiguity of this assertion. The complexity of this appreciation comes through in the following remark from one participant:

> I think here that with our teachers, teaching comes first and you should strive for excellence. It doesn't matter if it's the classroom or it's an athletic field, and I think that's a strong push and something to be proud of. That was something that always really bothered me to go to a meeting and in the past, I was in the social studies field and I moved last year into [something else], but you introduce yourself and you say, "Yes, I

> teach American history and I coach football." And it's an automatic stereotype. And I don't ever want to be ashamed that I coach and I influence a lot of young men and we've been very successful. You know, but there's times that I didn't say I coached just to see the response, and it was different. But I had as much pride in the classroom as I did on the practice field, the game on Friday night, and I think that's a big thing with us.

In fact, the conversation made it clear that athletics and academics were bound closely together, with teachers and coaches actively working each role to enhance the other.

In a small school like Oneida, this common overlap of reinforcing roles is possible; in much larger schools it is far less common.[28] It struck us that the Oneida teachers and staff were working this system purposefully for the benefit of students and community. Inevitably this means that neither academics nor sports come first. One teacher who had taught elsewhere, where sports *were* (according to her) given priority, reports a different experience in Oneida:

> I was having some trouble with some athletes and a coach was trying to sort of push me into helping them still remain eligible, but that coach was put in their place very quick and very—and got in quite a bit of serious trouble because of it. I saw that support for me and what I was trying to do with the academics and . . . when they come in and say, "Well, I had a game last night and I just didn't have time," I say, "Hey, your academics is what's going to get you through life, not playing basketball."

There is an ethos of concerted effort prevailing in the school, an ethos that perhaps reflects the enterprising character of the town. It was not surprising, therefore, to have the story begun in the preceding passage continue, practically in the same breath:

> And since it's a small school, a lot of our students end up playing every sport coming and going. You know, we don't have enough to make up teams unless they participate. And so, you know [for] a lot of them, it's an all-year-long thing. They go straight from one practice to another and some of them still hold down jobs.[29] They're a lot harder working than a lot of students that I've been around, some of them.

Leadership. When we asked the teachers about the source of the leadership that sustained the school, the first response articulated was "I think we all have a leadership role. . . . I really think you could say . . . that each teacher expects their best." They were not bashful about exercising responsibility or recognizing its effect.

At the same time, the teachers indicated that their leadership was enabled by the principal and the superintendent. For example, one teacher noted,

> Our principal has a very open-door policy. I don't have to sit down and plot my plan before I go to him. . . . You understand, he is my superior, but yet he presents himself, I don't mean as an equal, but [you just] go to him with an open mind and he speaks to you with an open mind. I don't have to sit down and plot my plan before I go to him.

This remark seems to indicate that the teachers vest the same degree of trust and confidence in Coach Harper that the students do.

The superintendent was credited with setting the tone for the entire district, so that the district leadership was viewed as enabling a style consistent with the ethos of the school. When asked whether micromanagement had ever been the style of the board or the superintendent, the answer was "no," but the response was elaborated upon as follows:

> I think it's great that if you do make a mistake that it's looked at as a learning opportunity rather than how many lashes can I give you for this. . . . They seem to be more supportive . . . you know, "Let's do it different next time; let's see how we can fix the problem." And that's from the superintendent. I mean, he seems to set the tone a lot. If he were the type that were real high strung and really got all over people, then I'm sure it would filter down. And you know, our school board isn't that way. Our superintendent isn't that way. He would come up tomorrow and sit in my class if I asked him to. He would be there.

Difficulties. In some schools, busy or burned-out teachers cannot avoid conveying the impression that they are besieged by troubled students or parents, or that students somehow constitute "the opposition." Such signs of difficulty were notably absent from this conversation, but the teachers did point up some challenges explicitly.

Remarks from the researchers about burnout led to mention of salaries. The teachers said that the school committee structure prevented burnout. The reason offered surprised us. The school is partially governed by faculty committees with "some power, so you feel like your efforts are worthwhile." The committees meet after school, and with all that the teachers already do, the surprise for the visitors was that teachers would cite *extra duties* as a way to prevent burnout!

Oneida teachers agreed to forego collective bargaining (to which they are entitled under Tennessee law) in exchange for ongoing support by the aforementioned benefactor. Their reasoning reflects dedication to a mission that transcends salary: "One reason we backed off on that [was] because we felt we had most everything that we would have gotten through a contract anyway." But salaries remain a concern, though evidently not a priority. As one teacher put it,

> Yeah, if we could just get a little better salaries for the teachers—that's the thing. Your teacher salaries are poorer here than they are in the county [the SCSD]. The teachers' salaries are terrible here. I think we're 96th in the state [out of about 150 districts].

Another circumstance that troubled teachers were the comparative merits of heterogeneous versus homogeneous grouping. Teachers seemed conflicted on the issue. Opinion was perhaps divided, but not so sharply, it seemed to us, as to constitute a controversy. How best to group students was an issue that seemed to *puzzle* the teachers. The school had added a number of advanced placement classes into which academically talented students selected themselves. But for the rest, students seemed not to be grouped by ability or even by achievement within particular courses. Thus, the school was not *tracked*, and very little homogeneous grouping was actually implemented. Clearly, some teachers were not sure that the present arrangement was optimal.

The puzzle for teachers is a long-standing one: how to best serve students who are attempting to learn the same thing but who arrive with widely differing preparations. This situation (that is, teaching students with a wide range of previous accomplishments) seems to leave many teachers feeling that they may not have given their best to all students. In the ethos of the school—that is, hard work combined with caring—this perception would be distressing.

In our conversation, there was no sense that closure on the issue might be imminent. In some ways, of course, this concern is the existential dilemma of teaching. Most people who teach or have taught would recognize this nagging feeling of inadequacy. How can one be *sure* one has done enough? The feeling can be neither dismissed nor answered with certainty. Ultimately good teachers want to do quite a bit more than just "enough."

All of the teachers in the focus group expressed intense dissatisfaction with standardized testing, despite the fact that Oneida was doing quite well in statewide comparisons on such tests.

One participant remarked,

> I may be speaking for myself, but I know a lot of teachers are really fed up and tired of seeing so much standardized testing and I don't think standardized testing is fair to a lot of students. . . . I don't think you can have *one test that meets the needs of everybody in the country* [emphasis added].

Apparently, however, strong administrative support exists for continued testing, and the state of Tennessee itself has mandated yearly testing of all students for the Tennessee Value Added Assessment Program.

Teachers believed that their opinions about possible overuse of testing would carry little weight in the school, the district, or the state. This sense of powerlessness stands in sharp contrast to the teachers' general outlook, which otherwise seems distinctly powerful and secure.

Discussion

We visited Oneida High School in an attempt to develop a somewhat detailed impression of how and why the school might be said to flourish. We wanted to know how the school had been retained in the face of possible closure, and what influences sustained it to the point that it was said to "flourish." A true ethnography would tell a much more detailed story, but the data gathered during our visit suggest some very strong possibilities that are consistent with the research and evaluation literature about such places. In addition, there are unique circumstances that account for the current success[30] of this particular school and district.

Retaining the school. The OSSD has a 75-year history as a unique institution for the community that sponsors it. It nonetheless exists

within a state system in which the norms would easily permit, and probably facilitate, its incorporation into the SCSD. This circumstance means that the community that sponsors the district, basically the town of Oneida,[31] must maintain the school effectively amid this ever-present, if mostly tacit, pressure to combine with the county district. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, relations within the school community eroded to the point of precipitating fears that the district might be nearing the end of its existence. The potential loss of the district appears to have constituted the wake-up call that rallied the community. Both the grassroots and the elite reportedly contributed to the defense. Fund raising, including the successful application for a substantial grant from a small group of private benefactors, leveraged a facilities program and an educational improvement program. The town's elite network (that is, prominent business and political leaders and affluent benefactors) secured the commitment of a school district leader who was, it seemed to us, ideally suited to help the district go beyond mere maintenance of the district.

Sustaining the school. It seemed to us, as well, that a "large vision" sustains Oneida High School. Family, hard work, caring for others, and the sense that these values link generations may constitute the core meanings behind this sustenance.

The town of Oneida, being the center of enterprise in Scott County, also sustains its school with an influential view of academics as the route by which young people may discover, as one participant in the parent focus group phrased it, "their vocation." Increasingly the actual discovery, if one can so conclude from the data gathered, will take place in educational experiences beyond high school. It seemed to us that students were being helped at many turns to look inward at themselves, but also to look outward at their community for a source of meaning and purpose. And the local sense of "vocation" seemed to us to include the idea that students would return home where vocations would be most meaningfully practiced.

Now, no one articulated this view in exactly this way, and the people we talked with might be surprised to hear it phrased like this. But much of what we heard from adults and students suggests this interpretation. The "vocation" we heard described was not an abstract set of skills that might be used anywhere, nor did it seem to point to an abstract "professionalism" useful in Nashville, Memphis, or New York

(as a focus group participant put it). Instead, it seemed to entail an uncommon degree of devotion and higher purpose; that is, the duty to develop some skills and use them on native ground for the benefit of community and family.[32]

This interpretation strikes us sharply, perhaps because we have been accustomed to rural school systems (in central Appalachia) that emphasize a very different construction of vocation; one that facilitates permanent outmigration, abstract professionalism, and personal advancement over the common good.[33] Our own experience enables us, perhaps, to recognize that something very different is happening at Oneida High School in Scott County, Tennessee.

The flourishing school. What sustains the school is ultimately what allows it to flourish under "decent" conditions. Oneida High School, we think, flourishes simply because it so obviously reflects the commitments that, in fact, sustain it.

Decency also implies economic factors. In the OSSD private funds have supplemented public schooling for the good of the community. In comparatively "poor" Oneida (where, according to the *School District Data Book*, the median household income was half the national average, the overall poverty rate more than twice the national average, and the per-pupil expenditure less than half the national average), the willingness of wealthy residents and prosperous businesses to fund the common good must surely be applauded.

Conclusion

The case of Oneida suggests that the all-too-common disconnection of schools and communities need not happen. It also suggests the nature of the work required to sustain local schools that are integral to their communities. The community, in sustaining the high school in Oneida, articulates a view of the outside world that reflects an intense respect for local perspectives. The result seems to be an institution that puts *local* purposes before global purposes. The result is not really a high school that could thrive anywhere in the country, but one that thrives where it is. Oneida High School offers an academic and social experience that most Americans would envy, while maintaining its particularity. That accomplishment is perhaps especially enviable. Being widely enviable *yet* particular may constitute an indication that the OSSD community is realizing its vision of sustainability at a high level. Oneida

is, perhaps, an exemplar of the "gemeinschaft community" in every sense of the word.[34]

Notes

1. This case study was conducted by the regional educational laboratory at AEL, Inc., as part of the Laboratory Network Program funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement.
2. See, for example, A. DeYoung, *The Life and Death of a Rural American High School: Farewell, Little Kanawha* (New York: Garland, 1995); and A. Peshkin, *The Imperfect Union: School Consolidation and Community Conflict* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).
3. See, for example, C. Howley and H. Harmon, "K-12 Unit Schooling in Rural America: A First Description," *The Rural Educator* 22(1): 10-18 (2000); and P. Theobald and C. Howley, "Public Purpose and the Preparation of Teachers for Rural Schools," *The Teacher Educator* 33 (3): 150-64 (1998).
4. The town of Oneida lies astride U.S. Route 27 in north central Tennessee, approximately 7 miles south of the Kentucky border.
5. H. C. Smith, *Dusty Bits of the Forgotten Past: A History of Scott County* (Huntsville, TN: Scott County Historical Society, 1985), 504-05.
6. Segregation, of course, prevailed at that time, so a student had to be White to be "eligible."
7. This observation, however, needs a good deal of explanation. People with whom we talked insisted that their less affluent neighbors would be offended to be called "poor" or "living in poverty." And our conversations indicated that returnees, for instance, considered reduced incomes a very acceptable price to pay for the opportunity to live once again in Scott County.
8. Data sources describing the town of Oneida and the OSSD offer conflicting information because of the "special" status of the district. Accurate data describing *district residents* differ from data describing *residents of the town*. To complicate matters further, these data differ from data describing the circumstances of *families whose children actually attend* the OSSD, since 60 percent of OSSD students actually live outside the district boundaries—boundaries not coincident with the boundaries of the town!
9. Scott County's rural town development conforms to a pattern identified by scholar of city life Jane Jacobs, *Cities and the Wealth of Nations: Principles of Economic Life* (New York: Random House, 1984). According to Jacobs, cities tend to specialize in government or trade, adhering to what Jacobs, in a later work *Systems of Survival: A Dialogue on the Moral Foundations of Commerce and Politics* (New York: Vintage, 1992), terms the guardian moral code or the trader moral code. At the state level, leadership is often divided between such cities: New York City and Albany; Minneapolis and St. Paul; Frankfort and Louisville (or Lexington). The guardian centers are typically restrained and conservative in style, whereas the trader cities are often flamboyant. This specialization seems, somewhat surprisingly, to be at work in rural Scott County. The more typical *rural* situation is that the county seat combines trading and governmental functions in one town. In Scott County, however, the more staid town of Huntsville is the governmental center, while the

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busier, flashier Oneida is the clear center of trade. (These adjectives hardly do justice to the two towns but are used to give the reader a quick flavor of the differences.) The distinction may help explain the unique rural *entrepreneurial outlook* on education that seems to prevail in Oneida.

10. Smith, *Dusty Bits of the Forgotten Past*, 505.

11. See, for example, DeYoung's 1995 account of Gassaway and Burnsville, West Virginia, *The Life and Death of a Rural American High School.*

12. The OSSD gets funding from the county commission on a per-pupil basis. This money would otherwise flow to the SCSD. Prevailing values of efficiency and centralization tend to favor the absorption of independent districts by county districts that surround them. Against this tendency are arrayed the power and influence of the localities that sustain independence. In the case of the OSSD, one might guess that power and influence proceed not from wealth (Oneida is not an affluent place) but from its legacy of enterprise and civic action. The higher average educational attainment in the town probably reflects this legacy. In any case, a crisis of leadership that entailed financial difficulties would often constitute sufficient justification for an SEA to act to reorganize a district out of existence (see, for example, Peshkin, *The Imperfect Union*. In fact, the fire marshal *had* reportedly "threatened" to condemn the district's facilities [T. Harper, "Oneida, Tennessee Has Fixed Its Gravely Ill Schools for Good," *Sky* 118: 121-22 [May 2000]). This threat is commonly made throughout rural America, but it is seldom carried out. The real threat is that inadequate facilities constitute a pressing reason to consolidate rural schools, all else equal.

13. See Appendix B for an update by Mayfield Brown on recent events in Oneida.

14. Factors that limit choice, of course, would probably include lack of transportation and distance from the town of Oneida. Investigation of the influence of such conditions is among the threads that more extensive research of the district would have pursued. It is possible that choice and transportation issues mean that the OSSD attracts more affluent students from the county. Subsidized meal rates for Tennessee school *districts* (i.e., not the high school only) in 1996-1997 showed the OSSD at about the 85th percentile of poverty (with 54 percent of students receiving subsidized meals), statewide, on this measure, whereas on the same measure, the SCSD ranked at about the 98th percentile (81 percent receiving subsidized meals). Subsidized meal rates, of course, are influenced by factors other than poverty, such as grade level of student, recruitment efforts that vary by district and school, and parents' willingness to apply for assistance. Both districts, it is still clear, serve populations substantially more impoverished than average in Tennessee. (Source: Tennessee Department of Education Web page, accessed October 2000: http://www.k-12.state.tn.us/arc/rptcrd97/freed.htm).

15. Smith, *Dusty Bits of the Forgotten Past.*

16. See, for example, C. Howley, *Ongoing Dilemmas of School Size: A Short Story* (ERIC Digest) (Charleston, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, 1996), ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 401 089; K. Irmsher, *School Size* (ERIC Digest) (Eugene, OR: ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, 1997), ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 414 615; and M. Raywid, *Current Literature on Small Schools* (ERIC Digest) (Charleston, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, 1999), ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 425 049.

17. Both W. Jackson in *Becoming Native to This Place* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1994) and G. Logsdon in *The Contrary Farmer* (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green, 1993) argue for rural education that helps students become (to paraphrase the title of Jackson's book) "native to a place," that is, to making particular rural places *home*. Love of home, according to Logsdon, is a critical rural quality. Without it, he notes, small rural communities and occupations wither. Both writers, among many others, contrast this rural attachment to home-place with the placeless upward mobility on which, they claim, so much educational practice (including practice in some rural schools) rests.

18. The "life-world" is a concept invented by the philosopher Jürgen Habermas to indicate the realm of everyday life, a realm that is often unremarked and unexamined, but from which, according to Habermas, the deepest meanings of our lives arise. The concept has been popularized in the United States by a number of scholars, including, in the field of education, Thomas Sergiovanni. Both Habermas and Sergiovanni believe that the life-world was assaulted during the 20th century by forces (e.g., advertising) that eroded its ability to serve as a source of strength for communities and individuals. In other words, the decline of community (and common purpose generally) is partly attributable to a narrowed scope for the life-world.

19. See, for example, Annenberg Rural Challenge, *The Annenberg Rural Challenge* (Granby, CO: Author, 1995), ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 391 623; also see the Rural School and Community Trust Web site: http://www.ruraledu.org.

20. We saw *nothing* in the Oneida schools in violation of this principle. At the same time, however, both authors appreciate the fact that adults or children are bound to retain and cultivate their faith—whatever it may be—on both sides of the schoolhouse doors. This is true of both of us. Incidentally, one of the authors is a Christian and one is not.

21. See, for instance, 22 R. Hofstadter, *Anti-intellectualism in American Life* (New York, Knopf, 1963) and *Academic Freedom in the Age of the College* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1955).

22. We saw *nothing* in the Oneida schools in violation of this principle. At the same time, however, both authors appreciate the fact that adults or children retain and cultivate their faith—whatever it may be—on both sides of the schoolhouse doors. Incidentally, one of the authors is a Christian and one is not.

23. All data are from the Common Core of Data (CCD) School Years 1993-94 through 1997-98, published by the National Center for Education Statistics (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 2000).

24. One teacher told us that a visiting university professor had criticized high school staff for nurturing students. The teacher implicated that the visitor believed such nurture was somehow inappropriate. In what way or to what extent it was inappropriate was not clarified.

25. Teachers were called by their titles: Miss, Ms., Mrs. most commonly for the women and "coach" the usual title for the men. Women who coached were known as "coach" also. A few men did not coach and were called "Mr." With 24 faculty members, the teachers were every bit as busy with extracurricular activities as their students.

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26. See, for example, D. Kemmis, *Community and the Politics of Place* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990).

27. That is, for this teacher and probably many of his colleagues, the commitment to make Scott County home is an active, thought-out choice, and not the path of least resistance, as it might appear to outsiders.

28. See, for example, D. Meier, "Can the Odds Be Changed?" *Phi Delta Kappan* 79(5): 358-62 (1998).

29. We asked students in the focus group how many held jobs. About half indicated they did.

30. At the 85th percentile of poverty (subsidized meal rates) in the state, OSSD students as a group typically score in the range of 65th-75th percentile on nationally normed tests of achievement. One should also note that the SCSD, at the 98th percentile of poverty on this measure, exhibits test scores that hover around the mean of national norms. Means on college entrance tests (the ACT is most frequently taken by students) are nearly the same for the two districts (ACT composite score, 1996-1997). (Source: Tennessee Department of Education Web site, accessed October 2000, http://www.k-12.state.tn.us/arc/rptcrd97/index.html).

31. In fact, the geographic boundary of the OSSD is not even coincident with the municipal boundaries. The boundary is most commonly described as the "watershed of Pine Creek," apparently the locale in which the strongest support for the creation of the district existed in 1915. People within this watershed vote and tax themselves for the maintenance of the district, but the district also secures about 25 percent of its funding from the county administration.

32. Local families, as noted previously, can trace their roots in the county back 200 years or more. Kinship networks are probably dense and strongly connected, though we were not able to investigate this likelihood. Again, this is an issue that would concern an ethnographic effort.

33. See, for instance, A. DeYoung and C. Howley, "The Political Economy of Rural School Consolidation," *Peabody Journal of Education* 67(4): 63-89 (1992); A. DeYoung, C. Howley, and P. Theobald, "Cultural Contradictions of Middle Schooling for Rural Community Survival," *Journal of Research in Rural Education* 11(1): 24-35 (1995); H. Harmon, "Creating Work-Based Learning Opportunities for Students in Rural Schools," *High School Magazine* 6(6): 22-27 (1999); Howley, *Ongoing Dilemmas of School Size*; C. Howley, H. Harmon, and G. Leopold, "Rural Scholars or Bright Rednecks? Aspirations for a Sense of Place among Rural Youth in Appalachia," *Journal of Research in Rural Education* 12(3): 150-60 (1996); and K. Seal and H. Harmon, "Realities of Rural School Reform," *Phi Delta Kappan* 77(2): 119-25 (1995).

34. F. Lutz and C. Merz, *The Politics of School/Community Relations* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1992). The German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies, in *Community and Society*, translated by C. Loomis (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1957), first distinguished between "gemeinschaft" and "gesellschaft" groups at the end of the nineteenth century. People in *gemeinschaft* groups have been said to cohere despite their differences, whereas in *gesellschaft* groups, people remain separate despite their commonalities. *Gemeinschaft* literally means "community" or "commonality," whereas *gesellschaft* denotes "corporation," "association," or "society."

CHAPTER 5

We Built It and They Came: A Case Study of Wahluke High School, Mattawa, Washington

DIANE DORFMAN[1]

In the high desert beyond the Hanford Nuclear Reservation and along the bend of the Columbia River lie the hamlets and farmlands of Wahluke School District, in Grant County, Washington. The landscape is dry; in the November chill it is dusty brown and gray. Stands of bare fruit trees line the roads. Beyond the trees are the battered wooden shacks and trailers of the immigrant farm workers. Strung along the road up the hill to the town of Mattawa[2] are an auto supply store, Anglo and Mexican grocery stores, and a community center. Neat trailer homes, interspersed with peeling, rusty, boarded trailers, line the handful of streets that mark the town off from the desert.

Wahluke School District

At the last intersection, a left turn leads to the brick building housing Wahluke School District's administrative offices. A flag waves in front of the offices, which were built in 1952 by the Public Utilities District (PUD) to house the then newly reopened school. The local school had been closed and all the town residents moved when the federal government took the land and built the nuclear reservation.

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Some land has been returned along with the school, but much of the land surrounding Mattawa is still held by the government.

Beyond the offices, Mattawa Elementary, Saddle Mountain Intermediate, Morris Schott Middle, and Wahluke High School stretch back along the road, which is surrounded by fields. The whole district sits on this single patch of land in Mattawa.

The district has a short but spectacular history. Wahluke High School was founded in the early 1980s. The community struggled with the state to build this school that has since grown and flourished. Having recently acquired 60 acres across the road, the district awaits the start of new construction. Additions have been made to the current high school, and the intermediate school is new, but, with a 244 percent increase in enrollment in the past decade, the district is one of the fastest growing in Washington state. The Wahluke High School principal said the district has seen construction every year he has been there and they are hungrily eyeing those 60 acres across the road.

The founding of the high school is both a cause and an effect of the demographic changes the community has experienced over the past 20 years. Steady changes in population size and ethnicity played an important role in the founding of the school, though residents may not fully acknowledge all the implications of the community's transformation, and first-time visitors would be hard pressed to see them.

Outwardly, the district presents only a few symbols of these transformations. The district offices have been remodeled, and in the bright reception area hang enlarged photographs of the local Wanapum peoples in tribal dress at festivals. Recognizing local Native people is important to the district's sense of identity. The high school symbol is an Indian warrior head; their football team is named the "Warriors." An Indian maiden memorializes Mrs. Schott, a founding member of the community. The Wanapum remain a locally vital presence, but for the district, the Native identity is largely symbolic. Wanapum students comprise a small fraction of school enrollment.

The staff in the district is largely Anglo, but the principals of the intermediate and elementary schools tell us more about a growing proportion of community members. The principals, Luz Juarez-Stump and Delcine Mesa-Johnson, are both the daughters of Hispanic immigrants and they flesh out a picture of the community that begins forming as one drives past the Mexican grocery store in town and past

the fruit trees tended by immigrant farm workers. The schools and the district serve a local population that is more than 70 percent Hispanic. The sons and daughters of the Latinos and Latinas who migrated to northern farms for work have settled among the orchards of Mattawa with their families. These orchards offer year-round employment. Instead of moving with the crops, families are staying on in Mattawa and they are sending their children to school. These laborers and the ethnic difference they represent are as much a part of Mattawa as the farms, streets, and district buildings.

What lies beneath this snapshot of a small, rural district is the story of how Anglo farmers joined together to found a high school to which the children of the farm workers now go. The residents of Mattawa worked to build their community through agricultural development and access to secondary education. Was the school built to educate the children of Hispanic farm workers? Perhaps. But, as we learn the story of the farmers and their school, we find that it is not at all clear.

Founding a School

After the federal government expropriated the land that included Mattawa in the 1940s, it moved residents away and closed the local school. Following the war, some land was returned, homes reclaimed, and limited farm production resumed. Row crops predominated on the dry land. In 1952, the PUD was building the Wanapum and Priest Rapids dams and wanted an educated labor force. They built what is now the administration building to house the reopened elementary and middle schools. Around this time, Morris Schott and his wife began to buy up large tracts of land and rebuild a town devastated by the wartime relocation. This rebuilding process coincided with the Grant County Improvement Project, which brought irrigation (from the dams) to the area. Irrigation increased row cropping and led subsequently to orchard production. The combination of climate, irrigation, and hard work have made the orchards a huge success. Mattawa sits in a region that enjoys a great number (260) of sunny and frost-free days each year, and the town produces the state's earliest apples and cherries. Thirty-eight thousand acres[3] of apples have come into production around Mattawa since 1977. In addition, construction on the dams, plutonium processing, and agriculture have employed growing numbers of people.

The town was rebuilding itself, but not actually schooling its own children in high school. To attend high school throughout the 1960s and 1970s, all local students went to the towns of Royal City or Othello—30 to 40 distant miles. Parents of middle school graduates could choose the school to which their children would be bused. Decisions were often based upon which school was closer to where they lived.

In the mid-1970s, people in Mattawa grew increasingly dissatisfied. Busing kids long distances, unpopular to begin with, was becoming somewhat contentious. A growing controversy revolved around students' participation in sports or other extracurricular activities. Kids had to wait unsupervised for buses after practices. They began to cause and get into trouble, dishonoring Mattawa's name in all three towns. Solutions brought forth to deal with the problem were of limited use. Getting students their own cars was financially prohibitive. Another solution—not participating in sports—was unthinkable.

The discipline problem of students too far from home became a major rallying point for those Mattawa residents who had begun to discuss the idea of building a local high school. Residents were also moved to call for a high school by the changes in local agricultural production. They foresaw the population increase that expanding orchard production would eventually bring. Larger populations would want a nearby high school, and a local high school would persuade people to settle in Mattawa, as opposed to Royal City or Othello. According to Lark Moore, who has lived in Mattawa since the early 1970s and serves as the school district business manager, the combination of factors, people, and personalities turned talk of a high school into a sustained effort to lobby the state school board and superintendent of public instruction (SPI).

Two names emerged from my conversations with people about the effort to establish the high school: former superintendent Shirley Bauer and farmer Jack Yorgesen. Although these two were credited with taking the most active roles, all with whom I spoke credited the community as a whole for the success of the effort.

Superintendent Bauer was described as an important figure because she responded to the community's need quickly and decisively. When the community called for a high school, she went to work to find out

how to get one. She wrote the applications to the SPI, and several community members wrote applications, letters, and strategic plans to a number of different agencies. In response, the SPI and state board of education looked at the figures on existing population, ignored the projected population estimates suggested by expanding agricultural production, and rejected the proposal for a local high school.

Jack Yorgesen is a local resident and father of six children. He and his wife had a strong interest in getting Mattawa high school students educated in Mattawa. Jack's brother has nine children. The whole family worked to convince local people and state officials that the school was not only a good idea, but absolutely necessary to the existence of Mattawa as a community. Community members argued that sports teams and high school events constituted a core in small towns and rural areas. Without that core, Mattawa was in danger of losing its very sense of self, they argued.

The majority of local people strongly supported the school. From 1978 to 1982 they met at the grocery, in homes, and in town, to plan, strategize, and prepare. Opposition reportedly came from a number of older citizens. They objected to the financial support of the school that would be acquired through bonds and levies, and in the words of a parent active at the time, "they opposed change in any form." This parent said, however, that the opponents were soon persuaded that local kids needed to be educated locally. They gave their support when they also began to realize that the school would offer services and education to everyone (as indeed it now does).

Other work to establish the high school involved persuading the state that the school was needed and securing funding to build and operate it. Yet, the funding was not entirely the responsibility of the state. When the state began to relent, indicating tentative approval of the school, officials told Mattawa leaders that the community would have to pass bonds and levies before establishment of the school could be formally approved. The first bond vote passed with 78 percent support. The first levy to fund the school failed, due largely to the opposition previously mentioned. But the second levy passed.

The crucial factor in the success, however, was not this vote, the concerted leadership of Bauer and Yorgesen, the support of older residents, or even the state's assent. Instead, I was told, a grand gesture by 30 residents actually carried the day.

In 1984, 30 Mattawa farmers piled into their own cars and drove across the state to Whitby Island, one of the San Juan Islands in the northwest corner of Washington, to attend a state school board meeting en masse. The contingent[4] made four points to the board:

1. Irrigation and orchards would bring new people to the area and increase the local population considerably. The new families would need to be educated, and their decision on whether to settle in Mattawa or not could depend on the educational opportunities available.
2. More agriculture and more people would mean more commuters to high school. Many towns have some students who commute, but not 100 percent of the students.
3. Local kids were getting into trouble because of the long commute.
4. Mattawa was losing its identity. When asked where they were from, students would name the town in which they attended high school, not Mattawa.

The board listened, seemingly dumbstruck by the determination of the large contingent from Mattawa. The state board listened to population projections, as well as arguments that it was no longer tenable to bus an entire town's high school students such distances. They saw farmers who had left work and traveled across the state at their own expense to attend the meetings. They understood, as they had not apparently understood before, who the people of Mattawa were and what they wanted. They agreed to permit establishment of a high school, with their agreement contingent upon the passage of the bond. Patty Yorgesen later observed,

> We were given a high school . . . on the basis of a small clause on "remote and necessary" and if we could pass a bond to build. The vote on the state board looked as if it was going to come down to a tied vote with [the state superintendent of public instruction] to cast the deciding vote, which we knew would be a "no" vote. So they called for a break and we went to work trying to convince one board member to change his mind. Instead, one agreed to abstain and not vote, so it [the plea] would move on its own merit [without the intervention of the state superintendent].

The trip became legendary in subsequent years. Current Superintendent William Miller spoke of it to me with pride and admiration. He was deeply impressed with the resolve and commitment of the farmers. And he seemed certain that without this concerted public action, the state school board and SPI would have remained unmoved by the entreaties of distant Mattawa.

In early 1985, the school was founded. In the fall of 1986, the first class of graduating middle school students entered Wahluke High School. The town had decided that students already attending Royal City or Othello High would complete high school where they were. The dedication of Wahluke High School was ceremonious and determined. The town's victory was an invitation to start working. For Wahluke High School was not to be just a local *school*; it was to be an outstanding academic and community institution.

Wahluke High School

As was projected 20 years earlier, Wahluke School District has experienced substantial growth. In 1987, the district enrolled just 374 students in all grades. In 1997 (that is, at the time of my visits) the district enrolled 1,287 students, 263 of them at the high school.[5] Today the school lives up to its promises to the community. It is regarded as a first-rate high school and many graduates go on to college. In the past 10 years, three graduates who left to attend college have returned to teach at the high school.

The superintendent is pursuing an entrepreneurial model of instruction that began with a middle school and special education recycling program, "Rerun, Recycle," which reportedly now has a budget in the tens of thousands of dollars. The middle school students started an apple gift box business, shipping local apples as corporate gifts. And the high school students operate a very successful embroidery business called Fine Thread, through which they embroider team jackets, hats, and socks. The students decide what to market and to whom. They make hats with the Royal City emblem on them to sell at Wahluke-Royal City games. They are also getting contracts from local businesses to make hats, shirts, and uniforms.

In the history class, students have learned about the community through an oral history assignment. The art students have made stained glass windows for their school and for local businesses. An audio-video

course allows students to run a community radio station and play music, as well as broadcast news about community affairs. And the community, like small rural communities almost everywhere, is proud of its sports teams.

Wahluke High School also reaches further into the community, providing instruction for local people of all ages. The district offers GED and general education classes at the high school, while Big Bend Community College, located in Moses Lake, about 65 miles to the northeast of Mattawa, offers evening courses.

The school is also involved with the community in other ways. The community theater, for instance, is housed in the school (the district business manager is one of the leading community actors). When hearings were to be held about the government's prospective return of lands along the Columbia River, the superintendent offered the use of school buildings for the hearings. Senators and state officials joined local and regional residents to discuss how much land would be returned, how much would be kept for a nature reserve, and what to do with the remaining land given back. The hearings received statewide media coverage and praise from all participants.

Wahluke High School in Mattawa is a community school which continues to serve a community that is evolving and changing. The town has faced difficulties in its drive to build on its strengths and flourish concurrently with the school. For example, one reported barrier was that Mattawa shared Othello's zip code, which hindered the town's ability to secure grants and attract business for many years. "Can't develop without a zip code," the superintendent said. After several requests, the town was assigned its own zip code. Also, the lack of a municipal sewer system limited construction of multifamily housing units. People told me that if there were housing for orchard workers, the school enrollments would double. Even without the sewers and housing, 2,000 people have moved to the town over the past 20 years. Planning for the sewer project has reportedly been completed and funding secured.

If predictions are correct, Mattawa's growth will continue and new challenges will arise. Investors are now poised to set up housing development areas. A local vineyard won an international prize for its grapes and is attracting more investment. A resort with an 18-hole golf course

and water sports is planned. While the rate of growth experienced in Mattawa hardly constitutes a boom, it surpasses modest growth common in much of rural America from 1987 to 1997.

The biggest change in Mattawa, and most of the population growth, has been derived from the labor that has developed the orchards and vineyards. In 1987 the high school was 67 percent non-Hispanic white; in 1997, it was 71 percent Hispanic, far above the statewide average of 6 percent minority populations.

How does this affect the ways the high school serves its community? The superintendent and Wahluke's principal develop and preside over an array of programs designed to involve and serve Hispanic students. As Superintendent Miller explained, until recently, Hispanic students had not been represented on any sports teams. He established a Spanish sports circle, whose soccer players were soon playing on the school teams and, in fact, taking them to league championships. Bilingual transition classes operate in all grades. Class size is smaller than in other classes and there are more aides. The majority of students who speak only Spanish, however, are in the lower grades: 80 percent of elementary school students speak only Spanish. A full-time kindergarten English program, as well as a summer program, serve elementary students. The school district has adopted an approach that uses Spanish to teach skills, while simultaneously helping native Spanish speakers to learn English.

Observing middle school audio-video, math, and art classes, I met and spoke with many Spanish-speaking students. The Hispanic influence is reflected, as well, in the school's food service operation. I lunched on taquitos at the high school's All Sports Bistro, a student-run café that offers an alternative to cafeteria meals. The café sells lunch tickets every morning, but the superintendent and I had to ask the faculty sponsor of the café to reserve two of them for us, since the tickets usually sell out by 9 a.m. Even the regular cafeteria menu offered a choice (for instance) of corn dogs or tostadas.

I observed a senior history class taught by the dynamic teacher who had completed a local oral history project with her students. I was struck, however, by the reversed proportions of Hispanic to Anglo students in this class: there were just three Hispanic students. A conver-

sation with the principal confirmed that the high school drop-out rate among Hispanic students is "very high."

The numerous challenges are familiar themes in the literature on migrant education.[6] The principal, for instance, reported attempts to persuade parents not to remove children from school to work in the orchards. Other challenges include teen pregnancy, persistent dilemmas about language, pervasive poverty, and difficult domestic situations. Many Hispanic students, of course, do graduate from the high school and find work other than farm labor. Migrant Head Start and local shops are eager to hire Spanish-speaking graduates. Many Hispanic students also pursue postsecondary options, and at least one recent Hispanic graduate is reportedly attending medical school. Despite these hopeful signs, the overall circumstances facing the school, its Hispanic students, their families, and the community as a whole constitute a daunting challenge. Educators and citizens are working hard to meet the challenge, and their expectations for social progress are evident.

One teacher, for instance, has created his own "stay-in-school" program. Art teacher John Ball invited me to arrive early on the morning of my second day in Mattawa and accompany him on a "retrieval" mission. The following paragraphs will give readers an idea of how this daily mission unfolds.

At 8:00 a.m. he is in the administration office of the high school going over the day's attendance with the secretary. Together they check whether an absent student has been excused by a parent or has informed the school that he or she would be out that day. All students whose absence is not excused are noted by Ball. He calls those who have telephones. The rest, and those whose parents are unreachable, are on his list. He checks their addresses and, together with a Spanish-speaking assistant from the middle school, heads for his car. Then he's off.

This day, first stop is the adjacent community of Beverly. There, in a wooden shack surrounded by dirt and rusted metal, we "retrieve" Ernesto. Ball knocks on the door and the boy's mother answers. The assistant speaks to her, asking why her son wasn't in school. The boy appears, putting on his shirt. With the assistant translating, the art teacher and Ernesto's mother discuss the boy's lateness and his need to

get to school. With Ernesto in tow, we get in the car and set off for the home of the next student on the list.

This time, at his knock, two students come out of a trailer home with their jackets on and books in hand. "We were just late today," they explain; no excuse, no intention of staying out of school, just late. They seem happy and comfortable to be rounded up by John Ball. These students guide us to the next home, where no one answers the door. One of the students explains that the girl we are looking for no longer lives there and points out the trailer to which her family had moved.

On the way through town, we pass a young girl walking along the road with a bag of groceries. The assistant recognizes her as a middle school student. We stop the car to ask why she is not in school. She explains in Spanish that her mother is sick and she has to take care of her and her younger brother. John sees this as an excused absence. We leave her to her work and head back to the school with a full carload of more or less eager students. Ball pursues this daily effort with sensitivity. He exerts pressure, but with compassion and evident common sense.

The school and community are building bridges as opportunities arise. They have rallied together against a recent crime wave that culminated in a shooting at a local gas station. Gang activity is not tolerated at the school or in the town, and a substantial sum of money was spent on school surveillance equipment—cameras and motion sensors—to ensure that kids' actions are always observed. The parents and administrators with whom I spoke felt the monitoring helped ensure a safe atmosphere.

The high school constitutes a strong core for Mattawa and seemingly serves to anchor people to the locale. Nonetheless, *success* in the eyes of some students is synonymous with *achievement elsewhere*. Several students with whom I spoke said they hoped to attend college and work in one of the larger cities of central or western Washington. They spoke with admiration of graduates who were now pursuing careers in Seattle, for example.

One of the Wahluke High teachers, however, who was raised in Mattawa and who went to Royal City High School and Washington State University, had himself taught in a large city. His attitude was, "I've been out there." He had had the opportunity to choose where he wanted to be, and he had definitely *chosen* Mattawa.

Accomplishments and Challenges at Wahluke High School

The current superintendent receives enthusiastic support from students and teachers for the entrepreneurial model. Two middle school students were almost breathless as I watched them receive their first order for apple gift boxes. Dr. Miller is also lauded statewide for his antigang approach. He was, for instance, invited to address state school board meetings to describe how Mattawa remained a safe community. He supports a wide range of innovative, teacher-initiated projects in both academic and vocational programs. Computer literacy is taught in the intermediate school and a major software corporation has offered to provide the district with advanced training. The high school principal also works closely with his students to integrate academic and extracurricular activities.

Still, intense poverty and language difficulties continue to divide Mattawa. The high school is a microcosm of the community, so class and ethnic distinctions apply throughout. The high school staff and administration, that is, those in positions of authority, are largely Anglo, while the subordinate majority population is Hispanic. The realm of success, that is, graduation and access to a wide employment field, is largely the domain of the more affluent Anglos, while undereducation and limited job prospects generally constitute the domain of impoverished Hispanics.

As school board member Patricia Gerdes said, the struggling Hispanic immigrants *are* nonetheless members of the community of Mattawa. She wants to overcome the division that tends "to exclude immigrants from the identity and opportunities reserved for other Mattawans." She champions the role of the school in embracing, challenging, and educating *all* students. And she is convinced that the future of Mattawa will see Hispanic landowners, teachers, and farm laborers working alongside Anglos throughout the community.[7] Her faith derives in no small part from the school's role in continually redefining itself in relationship to the changing and growing community.

Notes

1. This case study was conducted by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory as part of the Laboratory Network Program funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement.
2. The town of Mattawa is located about 130 miles southeast of Seattle and approximately 16 miles south of the point at which I-90 crosses the Columbia River. The town sits about 3 miles due east of the river.
3. Representing a considerable capital investment, 38,000 acres is an *extensive* orchard planting.
4. Those 30 included the following: Craig and Vicki Sabin, Roxie Phillips, Dave and Sharon Yorgesen, Lark Moore, Drs. Shirley and Leroy Bauer, Jack and Patty Yorgesen, Elwin Golladay, Sharon Worgum, Elva Wilkie, Don and Geri Chumley, Charles Ragland, Virginia Yanoff, and Gordon and Suzan Lowell. Others who served on the committee were as follows: John Ball, Mary Jo Bassani, Jim Bennett, Jane Calaway, Trisha Casey, Roland Clark, Jim Curdy, Sunshine Didra, Charles Dougherty, Stephen Ellis, Patty Gerdes, Mark Hedman, Bill Hyndman, Glen Leland, Carol Maughan, Peggy Catlow, Linda Mead, Stan Nelson, Bob Parker, Christie Phelps, Wayne Sahli, Vonna Schutter, Harley Skagley, Judy Sutton, Tom Thorsen, and Steve Worgum.
5. The research team agreed that the town of Mattawa met the selection criteria. Growth had indeed come, contingent on irrigation, but the new population base was now comparatively stable. Mattawa, in particular, was by no means a boomtown: orchards, unlike rural mining or some rural manufacturing operations, are a long-term investment.
6. See A. Darder, R. Torres, and H. Gutiérrez, *Latinos and Education: A Critical Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1997); J. Flores, ed., *Children of La Frontera: Binational Efforts to Serve Mexican Migrant and Immigrant Students* (Charleston, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, 1996); and J. Koss-Chioino and L. Vargas, *Working with Latino Youth: Culture, Development, Context* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999).
7. See Appendix B for an update by William Miller on recent events in Mattawa.

CHAPTER 6

Flourishing in the Face of Adverse Rural Conditions: A Case Study of Thrasher School, Booneville, Mississippi[1]

CALVIN W. JACKSON[2]

Although the community of Thrasher, Mississippi, might continue to exist in some form without its school, Thrasher School could hardly exist in its present form without its community. Its apparent success today seems to depend on this close connection. The Thrasher community is extremely supportive of the school in both formal and informal ways. For example, the community displays a tremendous level of support for the high school athletic programs, which, in turn, are a major catalyst for drawing the community together. This is especially remarkable in the case of the basketball program. A consistent winner of state championships, the basketball team plays *every one* of its games on the road because the school has lacked a gymnasium for the past four years.

The community offers the school financial support, as well. As an example, the original Thrasher School building was destroyed by fire in May 1990. The community rallied to face this disaster and to finance reconstruction. In 1993, the new building opened. The quick reconstruction would not have been possible without the rapid communal response. Indeed, such disasters have sometimes served to remove schools permanently from rural communities. The community's action demonstrates its opposition to consolidation. (The issue of consolidation will be considered later in the chapter.)

At first glance, Thrasher and the other communities in Prentiss County might seem impoverished to visitors. Closer examination and conversations with school faculty, staff, students, and other community members provide a more vigorous picture. The adult members of this small community are mostly factory workers who earn minimum wage or slightly above. Very few adults are college educated and a large number of youth don't complete high school. Approximately eight percent of the high school graduates complete college. The school and the county strongly support and encourage enrollment in vocational programs. They recognize that for many students, this is the best way to prepare them for work in the local economy. There are no private schools in the county, and this community reportedly values public education for all of its children.

The School (Principal, Assistant Principal, Teachers, Students)

Thrasher School enrolls 482 students in grades K-12; 155 attend grades 9-12. The student-teacher ratio is reported locally as 13.7 to 1 (but see table 1 for cross-site comparable data). The student population is 76 percent white, 22 percent black, and 2 percent Asian.[3] Approximately 30 percent of each graduating class of 30-40 students attends a postsecondary program; 75 percent remain in the Booneville environs. Free and reduced-price meals are provided to 44 percent of all students.

Thrasher is a small school fighting to survive the threat of consolidation from its neighboring high school (just five miles distant). Many educators and policymakers might, in general, regard the preservation of a high school enrolling just 155 students but located so close to another small high school (nearby New Site High School enrolls about 300 students) as sentimentally misguided; most rural schools that used to exist in such close proximity to one another have been closed. But to the residents of Thrasher, the school—especially the high school—represents the heart of the people and the hamlet of Thrasher. Their defense is passionate and persistent, and thus far it has been effective.

The principal. Bill Buse is the principal at Thrasher. His dedication to the school and its students is striking. He lives in a house located on the campus and provided by the school, which gives him immediate access to the school seven days a week. Buse says he sees his school as one facility but two different "worlds." The K-6 environment is a different

world from the 7-12 environment. There are clearly two separate schools on the campus, with little interaction between them.

As one might expect in a school this size, Buse wears many hats. He sees such versatility and resourcefulness as an advantage for a school leader. He knows almost all the children by their first and last names. He knows their families and has helped to educate their siblings and, in many cases, their parents, as well. He exhibits affection and careful regard for the students at Thrasher School.

Bill Buse struck me as a creative man with strong leadership skills. He sees instruction as his first administrative priority. However, he views himself as "more than an instructional leader." He provides an ear for teacher concerns and is a mediator between teachers and parents. He unabashedly reports that the school is "run by the teachers," and his approach is to let them do their jobs without "unnecessary intrusions." But he also insists that teachers solve most classroom problems, including discipline.

Any member of the teaching staff may call a staff meeting, but meetings must be "worthwhile," Buse explains. Based on expressed need, staff development activities occur about once a month. Buse claims that he sees teachers as role models for the kids, and he works with them to help them cultivate good teaching habits. He believes teachers who also live and participate in this community can set good examples and cultivate pride in their students.

Buse works constantly to engage the community in school functions and bring adults onto the campus. He is engaged in curriculum development and the instructional program and uses a participatory approach to school management. The high school was implementing block scheduling during the year I visited (1997-1998), going from eight periods to four periods a day. With the new schedule, the school would offer five upper-level math and seven science classes.

One of the principal's goals was to have the school fully wired and on-line within a year. Computer hookups were in place for the library, and the English Department was already on-line. The library was slated to go on-line next. One computer lab was used primarily for K-4 students. Funds for further computer enhancements were available through a state technology initiative, but there were seven other schools in line ahead of Thrasher, and thus, it faced a long wait.

Assistant principal. Phil Worley is the assistant principal at Thrasher, but he also teaches science classes part-time. He has developed excellent computer skills and uses them in his administrative role.

A lifelong resident of the area, he voices the highest regard for the school's community and its people. He is a graduate of Thrasher, like his father and his brother. His wife teaches home economics at a neighboring high school.[4]

Like his colleague Bill Buse, Worley, too, views teachers as the central figures in managing student behavior. Unlike most assistant principals, he says he "will *not* administer discipline for the school." The school and the community enlarge one another, according to Worley, and events in the community are felt strongly in the school. For instance, the school closed recently in observance of a death in the community. Some years ago, when a tornado damaged his house, approximately 50 people gathered at dawn to help repair it.

Worley believes in the students at Thrasher and describes them as "real good kids." They resemble students anywhere, he says, exhibiting all kinds of interests and the gamut of academic talents. Like his principal, Worley maintains close relationships with students and knows them all by name. Yet, his special focus is in the elementary area. Worley doesn't believe there is "a bad teacher at Thrasher." Teachers love teaching here, he says, and the very low teacher turnover rate supports his claim. He describes his colleague Bill Buse as "a dedicated, good principal who is too good to us." The Thrasher School's reputation recently inspired two families to move into the area expressly so that their children could enroll there.

Worley describes the community surrounding Thrasher as an extended family of caring individuals who regard school officials as worthy of confidence. Although many outsiders might perceive the community as uninvolved in academic matters, they are very supportive of this aspect of the school. In the past, the Thrasher School did not maintain a parent teacher organization (PTO). Today, however, the PTO is an active, vibrant organization at the school.

Teachers. One of the teachers I interviewed was Ellen Shelton, who teaches high school English. Shelton moved to the area from Dallas, Texas. The school system in which she previously taught enrolled approximately 2,000 students. Shelton exhibited what I would call

genuine excitement for teaching and affection for the kids at Thrasher. She mentioned during the interview (as did Principal Buse) that the basketball team had an "away game" that night. She noted that she rarely misses a game. It was important for her, she said, to attend games to demonstrate her support for the school and the community. Though an urban outsider, she recognized and appreciated the influence athletics had on the relationship between community and school.

One of the surprising benefits of teaching in a very small high school like Thrasher, according to Shelton, is the opportunity to teach the same students every year from grade 9 through graduation. "You really get to know your students after teaching them for four years," she said.

In addition to all of the reasons mentioned by the principal and assistant principal, Thrasher flourishes, in Shelton's view, because teachers are a cohesive group, working with common purpose. Teacher interaction is common and the teachers experience interdisciplinary learning *themselves* as a result of the intense collaboration "necessary to make the school work." Teachers freely share successful teaching strategies and best practices with each other, and team teaching across subject areas is common.

Ellen Shelton would like to see an increase in the number of graduates who go on to some form of higher education. Unfortunately, the prevailing economic conditions make even high school graduation a hard sell for teachers. While practically all students want to remain in the area following graduation, the sorts of jobs available locally do not reward graduation. (Typically, the smallest poverty gap between rural and urban America is for high school dropouts, and the largest for college graduates; well-paid, skilled jobs are difficult to come by in rural areas, a major theme throughout rural history worldwide.[5]) The typical response from those who leave school before receiving a diploma is that they simply "lost interest." Nonetheless, as reported to me by those interviewed, graduation rates are high in comparison to state averages.

Students. Among the students I interviewed, "Samuel" (not his real name), a senior at the time, made a strong impression on me. An African American, Samuel had two brothers and two sisters who all graduated from Thrasher. He told me that he planned to attend the community college serving the Booneville-Prentiss County area.

Very active in student organizations at Thrasher, Samuel was the editor of the school yearbook and a member of five school clubs and service organizations. The students voted him "Mr. Thrasher," the male senior who best represented the spirit of the school. Ironically, Samuel was a transfer student from a nearby high school.

When asked why he chose to attend Thrasher, Samuel said that he "loved the environment and the people." He reported that he had "a great relationship" with his teachers. He confessed, however, that he was "a little nervous" on arriving at Thrasher. The change eventually proved easy, he indicated. Samuel reported that he commuted (that is, drove himself) approximately seven miles to get to Thrasher. His involvement in extracurricular activities, he said, helped him become a more assertive student. He had "learned a lot" at Thrasher and his teachers had "made sure" he had taken "the right courses" to be prepared for college. Samuel was convinced he made the right decision to enroll at Thrasher.

School Governance (Superintendent, School Board)

Mr. Ed McCoy is the superintendent of schools for this county district. One of his dreams for Thrasher is to build a gymnasium with a big stage; one large enough to handle all the performances the school wants to produce. He describes the imagined structure as a multipurpose facility, to serve as auditorium, gym, assembly hall, and fine arts center. If McCoy's vision prevails, Thrasher will have this facility sooner rather than later. Ed McCoy has a background in construction and taught electrical trade at the vocational technical center for 11 years. In most school building projects in the county, the superintendent serves as general contractor.[6]

Mr. McCoy quickly acknowledges the support of the community and its role in the life of the schools in the county. This strong community support was evident when the community borrowed money from the bank to build a band hall at the school and repaid the loan themselves. (According to McCoy, another nearby community erected and paid for an *entire building* of six classrooms. In fact, all six school communities in Prentiss County have borrowed money and erected buildings on their own at one time or another.)

McCoy views himself as "a strong disciplinarian." He stated emphatically that he does not "put up with problems of any kind." Test scores in his county district, he says, reflect an overall performance rating of 4.5 on the 5.0 scale established by the state accreditation entity.[7]

Gary Johnson, a member of the countywide school board, was in the last year of his sixth term. He indicated that he planned to seek reelection to a seventh term. Johnson works as an engineer at a factory within commuting distance, where he has been employed for the past 24 years. He is a 1971 graduate of Thrasher School, and reported that 36 students began the ninth grade with him, and 36 graduated four years later. He indicated that "the key was students helping students."

Johnson lives just two houses away from the school and remains very active in the school. At the time, he had a son in the eighth grade and a daughter in the sixth grade. His wife graduated from Thrasher, as did all six of his brothers. Like Johnson, they all still live in the community.

Johnson stated that "not much has changed" about Thrasher over the years, except for the new building. He feels good about the school today and believes in the teachers. He cited several examples of strong community support for the school. Though he drives 28 miles to work every day, he does not view a lengthy commute as a reason to leave his community.

His initial involvement with school governance came as a result of concern for his son, who experienced a hearing loss. Johnson became involved because he was convinced that special education was not the place for his child, and he was determined to ensure that his son "didn't end up there." Recognizing that his son would face challenges due to his disability, he eventually ran for a seat on the school board, to ensure that his son's needs would be addressed in a way that he viewed as best. He found that the teachers at Thrasher already had his son's best interest in their hearts.

He has nonetheless been successful in his role on the board and has served as board chairman for two years. He sees the role of the school board as a district governing body with a heavy emphasis on providing advice and addressing the broad issues of education. He is, he says, not at all interested in "running the school" on a day-to-day basis. He gives the principal and assistant principal "extremely high marks" on their per-

formance. Even though he represents the entire county district and has grown to love and appreciate all the schools, it appeared clear that his strongest allegiance continued to be to the school and community at Thrasher.

The Prevailing Perspective on Consolidation

On the issue of consolidating the local high schools, the position of this community, its teachers and administrators, and all their allied parties is quite clear: they *adamantly* oppose it. They report fighting long and hard to retain and maintain the community's identity in the school. I was told that one county superintendent lost his bid for reelection because he favored consolidation. The principal clearly recognizes the hypothetical advantages of consolidation, but stated that the potential loss to the community far outweighed, in his mind, the possible advantages.

One advantage of consolidation would be the ability to offer more varied classes. Operating efficiencies contingent on consolidation might also improve funding for instructional purposes.[8] But a major disadvantage would be the loss of closeness between faculty and students, according to principal Buse. Class size would increase and less time would be provided to individual student needs, he said. Superintendent McCoy saw consolidation as a way of destroying not only the Thrasher school, but its community as well. He felt that maintaining four high schools in one county gave four times as many kids a chance to get involved in activities, sports, and school life in general. He felt that large schools "lose control" and that disorder (including increased drug use and violence) would surely follow.

Summary Observations

Thrasher School is the center of the community of Thrasher. The operation of the school represents to the community the succession of generations of citizens; the school arguably thrives because of this legacy of community support. The Thrasher community is intimately involved in the school and takes personal pride in the grounds, building, sports, teams, and other aspects of the institution. Community members have a high degree of respect for the administration of the school.

Thrasher supports the school with its resources and talents and gives of itself freely to meet the school's needs.

These conclusions, plus evidence from the interviews, suggest that the school (and perhaps the Prentiss County School District as a whole) is preserved and sustained on very "traditional" terms. One might not expect to find the "latest thinking" on "constructivist instructional methods" or deep concern with national standards (though it seems likely that state requirements would be taken seriously). But it is clear to me that the school exists to serve and to sustain the community. Young people stay in the Thrasher-Booneville-Prentiss County area and are concerned with and proud of the locality and local ways of living. Loss of the school, it seems, is understood by the community as a serious threat to these ways of living. This hypothesis would explain why this apparently impoverished community so readily rebuilt the building destroyed by fire and funded and built a band hall under its own auspices.

I infer from my visit that a tacit goal of this community is to prove that a small, relatively impoverished, rural place can sustain a high school and help it thrive at a reasonable cost. Those whom I interviewed displayed an unabashed passion for Thrasher School. This level of community appreciation and support, in my experience, is rare and precious. I suspect that few educators are willing to honor and incorporate local purposes and values in the way that is required to win this sort of appreciation and support. Some observers of education believe, for instance, that the profession values innovation and change for its own sake, or for the sake of purposes not related to sustaining local communities.[9]

Notes

1. Though the hamlet of Thrasher appears on maps of Mississippi, the postal address is "Booneville." Thrasher is located in the northeast corner of Mississippi, about 15 miles south of Corinth, and about a mile and a half to the east of U.S. Route 45.
2. This case study was conducted by the Regional Educational Laboratory at Southeast Regional Vision for Education as part of the Laboratory Network Program funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement. Calvin W. Jackson is now a senior policy analyst at the South Carolina Department of Education.
3. Its 24 percent minority enrollment gives Thrasher School the greatest proportion of minority students of any school in the district, but the extent to which racial diversity is responsible for the community of Thrasher retaining its school is not

clear. The National Center for Education Statistics [NCES]. *Common Core of Data (CCD): School Years 1993-94 through 1997-98* (CD-ROM; NCES 2000-370). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 2000, shows that *none* of the six regular schools in Prentiss County, Mississippi, is predominantly African American, while three schools (two elementary schools and a high school) enroll no African Americans. Of course, many city districts in the North cannot achieve the degree of integration evident in Thrasher because residential patterns have become so segregated in those cities.

4. Prentiss County maintains four schools that include grades 9-12: three K-12 schools and one 9-12 school (NCES, 2000).

5. See, for instance, G. Huang and C. Howley, *Recent Trends in Rural Poverty: A Summary for Educators* (ERIC Digest) (Charleston, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, 1991), ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 335 180; J. Jacobs, *Cities and the Wealth of Nations: Principles of Economic Life* (New York: Random House, 1984); and R. Williams, *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

6. The 26,000 square-foot gymnasium project was completed at an approximate cost of $1.6 million and became operational in February 1999. A new 9,000 square-foot vo-tech building will be operational for the 2000-2001 school year.

7. According to recent information for 1996 now available from the Mississippi Department of Education (http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/acad/td/d5900032.htm), eighth-grade students at Thrasher scored at the 61st percentile on the "composite" measure of the CTBS/5; 96 percent of high school students passed the state's Functional Literacy Exam (soon to be supplanted by subject-area tests); "core" students taking the ACT in that year (n=6) returned a mean composite score of 19.8, while all Thrasher students taking the test (n=17) returned a mean composite score of 17.2. (It seems that far more students take the test than would be indicated by the reported rates of postsecondary enrollment; core students are evidently college-intending students.) In view of the community's modest economic circumstances, these results are *quite impressive*. These data describe performance in the 1996 school year and were the most recent available as of October 2000.

8. Such claims are often overstated by proponents, and, sometimes, consolidated schools prove more expensive to operate than those they have replaced. See, for example, E. Haller and D. Monk, "New Reforms, Old Reforms, and the Consolidation of Small Rural Schools," *Educational Administration Quarterly* 24(4): 470-83 (1988); C. Howley and J. Eckman, eds., *Sustainable Small Schools: A Handbook for Rural Communities* (Charleston, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, 1997); and A. Peshkin, *The Imperfect Union: School Consolidation and Community Conflict* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

9. Compare, for example, S. Arons, *A Short Route to Chaos: Conscience, Community, and the Reconstitution of American Schooling* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997); J. Bruner, *The Culture of Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996); D. Orr. *Earth in Mind: On Education, Environment, and the Human Prospect* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 1994); and K. Seal and H. Harmon, "Realities of Rural School Reform," *Phi Delta Kappan* 77(2): 119-25 (1995).

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CHAPTER 7

When the School Is the Community: A Case Study of Fourche Valley School, Briggsville, Arkansas

PATRICIA DEMLER HADDEN

As a researcher for the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, I visited Fourche Valley School District (FVSD) in March of 1998. During a two-day visit, I interviewed approximately 30 people including the school principal, high school teachers, and other staff members; the district superintendent; the school board president; students; parents; other community members; and a professor from Arkansas Tech University (ATU) who had been working with the Fourche Valley school on curriculum development and the establishment of a literacy lab for adults.

The interviews were conducted both individually and in focus groups of four to five people. While all groups provided input, I conducted more in-depth interviews with district board president Larry Aikman and the aforementioned professor. The extra attention given to these interviews was partly due to the fact that school was in session and these persons could spend more time with me than school staff and students, and partly because they each exhibited intense interest in the Fourche Valley School and its constituents. My "walking interview" with the school's principal was, however, another particularly fruitful source of information.

Fourche Valley School District is located in the Ouachita Mountains in central Arkansas. The 266-square-mile area served by the school district is home to about 950 people who live in eight small towns and settlements. None of the communities is incorporated, and the school district is the only public service agency in the area. Except for a volunteer fire fighters' cooperative, the school is the only identifiable and significant connection among the separate communities in Fourche Valley. The federal government estimates that the population in the area has grown less than three percent since the 1990 census.

This is a very small school, with 157 students for all grades K-12. Although many observers might claim that schools with enrollments per grade approaching 100 students could readily provide appropriate curriculums for their students, most educators and policymakers would doubt the ability of a school this small—with seven to 10 students per grade—to do so. I found a vibrant, inviting school that is nonetheless already considered successful by its constituents. These constituents believe the school, given the opportunity to survive, can continue to prove itself on anyone's measures.

I must remind readers that I make these observations based on a short visit and a limited number of interviews, set up, for the most part, by the school's superintendent, Jack O'Reilly. For a more comprehensive study, I would have investigated further certain issues raised in these interviews. For this study, however, the mission was to locate a small rural high school that is considered by fellow educators to be thriving in the face of adversity and to visit the school in an attempt to understand that reputation.

A Flourishing School in a Fragile Community

As expected, I found what can be considered a good school, measured against many criteria. What was unexpected was the realization that the school likely will not be sustainable; not for want of success, but because of adverse economic circumstances in the surrounding area. There are few jobs locally, and the jobs that exist pay meager wages. Any hope for organized, local economic development lies with the county government or the school, for the school serves as the community center. Among the eight small communities served by the FVSD, I found no governing bodies, no strong presence of churches,

and no civic organizations. Other than school events, funerals were the *only* events mentioned by the people interviewed as examples of how community members come together and support each other.

As the center of the community, the school does much of what a community governing body would be expected to do. At present, FVSD has leaders who are able to elicit the trust required to mobilize resources, plan, and to help their constituents broaden their sense of community. In turn, the leaders are blessed with local citizens who trust and respect their leadership and are willing to lend their talents and donate other resources to local projects.

It is important, I think, that the leaders are community insiders. At the same time, however, they bring wider awareness and certain skills and strengths gained from previously living outside the community. The school board president, Larry Aikman, is a native of the area who returned after a 30-year career in the military. The school principal, Cecilia Rice, is Aikman's daughter, whom (as he tells it) he "cajoled" into moving back to the area to take on the principalship. The school's superintendent, a Detroit native and former principal of an urban school, is married to a native of the area who wanted to return to her roots. Urban dwellers (or urban and suburban readers) may judge the closeness of these ties as suspicious or somehow objectionable, but I saw strength and authentic interest in developing a school program that serves its constituents well. Local rural schools, in fact, inevitably mirror their environment, and, according to many rural writers, the familiar bureaucratic models of schooling may be poorly suited to rural places.

I was impressed with what an excellent model for participation this school offers, including widespread sharing, community pride, reciprocal trust, caring, and respect. The overriding problems, though, are the weak local economy, the low literacy level of area adults, and the apparent lack of hope or optimism that things can be better, even within the specific province of education.

The Challenges: Isolation, Lack of Economic Opportunity, Low Aspirations

Fourche Valley is surrounded by the Ouachita National Forest, one of the largest national forests in the nation. The Arkansas Department of Education has designated the district "super-isolated." But the com-

munities served by the FVSD are separated more by lack of good roads than by distance. From the town of Briggsville, where the school is located, the nearest town with a full range of services is Russellville (population 25,000), located 40 miles away. This distance might be a reasonable commute in some places, but these are long miles of two-lane roads over a mountain ridge (easily located on maps by the road's tortuous curves).

Community members certainly view themselves as isolated. A parent of a second-grade student described her difficulty adjusting to the isolation when she first moved to Fourche Valley. "It was different for me because everything is so far away, but now I wouldn't leave," she said. "My sister would live here, but there are no jobs."

There are many good reasons to want to live in the area and to want family and loved ones to stay. Fourche Valley has a mild climate and is incredibly beautiful and virtually pristine. The surrounding countryside is mountainous and heavily forested. Since the national forest surrounds the valley, there is little worry that the area will lose its natural beauty to over-development. The valley's comparative isolation eventually could be remedied by improving the roadways. Possibly, telecommunications could offer opportunities for creating jobs, potentially making the valley a desirable home for outsiders sometime in the future.

Historical Context

Until the late 1800s, the Ouachita Mountain region was very sparsely populated. American Indians and a few settlers engaged in subsistence farming on the rich bottomlands along rivers and streams. When the interstate railway system reached the Ouachitas, farmers began to grow cash crops, and more people moved into the area. There was a region-wide boom in lumbering beginning in the 1880s, when speculators began to claim land from the public domain. In 1907, President Theodore Roosevelt set aside much of the remaining public land as a national forest. The U.S. Forest Service set up ranger outposts, built roads and a telephone system, fought forest fires, and attempted to control timber stealing. The area continued to boom in the wake of continued intensive logging until the depression of the 1930s, when bankrupt farmers and lumber company owners sold large tracts of land

to the Dierks family, the International Paper Company, and the U.S. Forest Service.

Economic activity has never returned to the level experienced during the early part of the twentieth century. Land ownership has been stable since shortly after World War II. Today, other than a propertied few, most residents own small tracts of land with small houses or mobile homes on them. Nearly everyone farms for personal consumption.

Although residents proudly view themselves as independent, I detected tension between this pride and the constraints of self-sufficiency. That is, the Fourche Valley people exhibited a degree of powerlessness similar to that described by Gaventa. As one member described the situation, "I think the people would love to make more money. We have strong community. But the mentality of the average [Valley] person is more independent than the average citizen, which is one reason he's out here. He likes his little house on his land, likes to have his gun, go fishing. But if an industry would come in here that would pay higher paying jobs, people would do flip-flops [presumably for joy]." The valley's inhabitants enjoy unparalleled scenic beauty, rich agricultural lands along rivers and streams in the area, and valuable timber and stone resources, but the majority of them live at a subsistence level.

Today, most adults either work in the poultry, swine, or beef processing factories, or they drive the long 40 miles to Russellville to work. Income levels from paid employment are generally low. Although school records indicate that just 13 percent of the residents live in poverty, many families clearly live very close to the poverty line, and approximately 55 percent of the district students receive subsidized meals. Census data for 1990 showed that the school district residents' median household income was almost 20 percent less than the median for the state and over 40 percent less than the national median household income. Though incomes are very modest, income distribution appears more equal here than in many U.S. communities. According to the school district's superintendent, Jack O'Reilly, however, community members' expectations of significant improvements in their economic welfare have diminished in recent years. New federal restrictions on access roads in national forests raise additional fears (that is, fears of job loss) about impacts on an already tenuous forest economy.

Over half of the surrounding county's income is derived from the manufacturing and processing of food and related products. County data show employment in services is increasing faster than any other sector, although this employment still represents a much smaller proportion of the total than does manufacturing.

The adult literacy rate is among the lowest in the nation. The Arkansas Department of Education ranks the education level of adults in the area in the lowest 10 percent in the state, and fewer than two percent of adults have college degrees. The area's only sources of local news are the Yell County weekly newspaper and the school newspaper. All residents interviewed, though, expressed satisfaction with their access to information. Of the newspaper one person said, "If we want to communicate to the people, the county paper is good." Community members also post fliers in the local stores and post office.

Despite the challenged economic status of Fourche Valley, community members, including the elders, youth, school staff, and other residents, *consistently* affirmed their blessings. Adults interviewed spoke of the beauty of the area, the lack of political strife, strong community connections, safety, and freedom from violence. Of all the attributes mentioned, the feeling of safety appeared to be foremost in the minds of many community members.

The young people in the communities repeated themes expressed by the adults—that is, a generally very positive image of their community. They "like the people" and emphasize how fortunate they are that the valley is a safe place. I asked a group of three girls to describe their communities for me. They all agreed that the community is so small that everyone knows everyone else. One said,

> You always know if something is going on. You're always welcome at people's houses because everyone's friends. There's not a big drug problem. There are some drugs like everywhere, but we don't have a big problem like they have in some places. We have zero gangs. We have no racism.

Another observed,

> We never have to worry about getting shot. We can walk down the street without worrying about being picked up. We're safe. We don't even have to lock our doors.

The high school students who took part in our group interviews seemed to view their blessings with unusual clarity despite understandable ambivalence about wanting to leave the area to pursue educational objectives (and other dreams and ambitions) and wanting to stay after graduation.

Fourche Valley School

One hundred fifty-seven students, 14 teachers, three instructional aides, five classified employees, a principal, and a superintendent make up the human resources of this tiny, geographically isolated school district. Most daily school bus routes cover more dirt forest roads than paved county roads.

The U.S. Department of Education's School District Data Book (based on 1990 census data) reports the school district's ethnicity as 100 percent Anglo, but school staff interviewed spoke about increasing numbers of Hispanic children who are coming to the area because their parents are working in the chicken factories. There is a trailer park in one of the small communities, and housing is a critical problem in the entire area. The Hispanic families move into the trailer park and their children attend school in FVSD until the families can move closer to the chicken factories, which are situated in another school district.

FVSD operates a single campus that serves first through twelfth grade. Although this study focused on the high school grades, a single building, headed by one principal, houses all grades. The physical plant consists of this main classroom building (modest but very attractive and inviting), a small frame building that houses the kindergarten and a Title I program, a large agriculture and science learning center, a 1940s-era woodpillared gym, and an antiquated cafeteria. The school facility is beautifully maintained. In front of the school is a fenced-in children's playscape built by community members. At the entrance of the school is a flower bed with blooming daffodils planted to spell out "FVSD." A community resident who is an expert gardener helped a group of students plant the bulbs.

The low socioeconomic status of most residents combined with the presence of the national forest gives the district a meager tax base. Thus, teacher salaries have been historically low compared to both the state average and to salaries in similarly small school districts nationally and within the state of Arkansas.

Considering adverse conditions such as widely shared poverty and low literacy rates, the Fourche Valley School performs better than might be expected. Traditional measures of student achievement such as test scores and school completion rates rank at about the median for the state (and *far above* the rank of adult literacy in the valley). In the previous few years, there had been minor increases in test scores. Yet, at the time of my visit, the school was going through significant changes and appeared to be operating in a mode of continuous improvement that would likely result in further improvement in the current level of student performance.

The Charter School Effort

The residents of Fourche Valley value what they have. They are especially involved in and appreciative of their school, and they have sustained this loyalty to it over time and in many ways. One significant rallying point was the school and community effort to become a charter school.

Like most very small school districts, Fourche Valley School District struggles to meet the many state standards in order to avoid dissolution and consolidation. Superintendent Jack O'Reilly saw charter school status as a way to improve school instructional services while simultaneously satisfying the state department of education's quality requirements. He introduced the idea to the community when he became superintendent. According to board president Larry Aikman, "A lot of misinformation got out. People got up in arms. 'They're trying to kill the school.' 'They're going to make a private school out of us.' 'They're going to make us wear uniforms.'"

According to O'Reilly and Aikman, the proposal to apply for a charter led to the largest community meeting ever held. Approximately 150 people were present.

Under the charter school law in Arkansas, 80 percent of a school district's teachers and administrators and 75 percent of the parents must approve a charter before the district can seek state approval. Because of the conflict in the community, the district invited all those eligible to vote on the issue. After the community meeting, over 90 percent of the adult residents voted for the charter. O'Reilly said, "We passed all of those hurdles. Everybody listened, and they overwhelmingly voted for it."

Despite the solid community support, after bringing district and community representatives before the Arkansas State Board of Education *four times,* the board voted down the charter four to three. School and community members expressed bitterness about the experience. Aikman said, "It's a sad, sad story. I get really emotional when I talk about it. The rejection, however, had its up side. Community support for the school increased, as an 'us versus them' interpretation of the rejection grew prevalent locally."

Local Definitions of Success

In keeping with our perspective that an effective rural school is responsive to local circumstances, I sought to understand the community members' expectations for their schools. I asked all persons interviewed to tell me what they thought made a good school and how the Fourche Valley High School measured up.

The residents with whom I spoke said they were pleased with their school and trusted its leaders. School staff and community members showed concern for traditional measures of student performance, but not to the detriment of a balanced program that values student morale or the skills and dispositions needed to make an isolated area home. Most people expressed satisfaction with the school, citing recent improvements in student morale and pride in the school, as well as increased adult participation in school affairs.

Parents and students spoke about the advantages of small classes, the close attention that teachers give students, and the importance of being "comfortable and safe." Several students talked about each student being able to get the kind of education he or she needed. When I asked what made a good student, they spoke about doing as well as one can, dependability, and getting along with others.

People most closely associated with the school—the board president, the district's superintendent, the school's principal—each expressed concern about high school students' performance, but they generally agreed that the best way to address the issue is through improvement of morale and school pride. Importantly, they feel that high morale and school and community pride are worthy accomplishments in themselves.

Board president Larry Aikman elaborated, "Historically, our high school . . . has not flourished like our elementary school has. But we are

addressing that in a number of ways. We recognize that for whatever reason, the school had not captured whatever it needed to capture with youngsters once they hit the 10th or 11th grade."

Aikman told about being a student himself in Fourche Valley and about returning to the area after retiring from the military.

> One of the things that disappointed me when I got on the board was the morale of the high school students. They just didn't seem to be proud of their school. I think all our elementary students have been very proud, enthusiastic, loved to come to school. That's something you can't turn around over night, but one of the things we're trying to do is keep the enthusiasm as (the students move) into the upper grades. I think through 10th grade now . . . probably 11th and 12th grade, we have made some pretty good improvement.

Superintendent Jack O'Reilly agreed with Aikman, saying, "If the kids were not enthused about the school, then it would all be a sham." Aikman continued,

> And when you get morale up and pride in school, that improves other things. One thing that I believe that we can do is improve test scores. And [we can do that] only if they want to improve their own test scores and take pride in the school and it means something to them to do that. We're the third smallest school in the state. When we start our basketball season, which lasts three months, it's going to be hard for us to ever have a winning season because most of the people we play are twice, three times the size we are. If we can win academically, that's what I want to do.

When I asked principal Cecelia Rice to define success, she said,

> I don't know if I can define it in a few words. My daughter [who was a high school junior] . . . *Academic success* is success for her. [But] for a lot of these kids, success means being able to have friends and getting along. . . . We're getting a lot of . . . students [from other schools]. They've been getting in fights—can't get along—so they're living with grandmother. And those kids do very well here. Success for those students is just not getting in trouble, getting along—their parents are . . . just wanting them to stop getting in

> trouble, not getting kicked out. You know: rules . . . [and] we're pretty strict here. If they break a rule, they know there are consequences. . . . That's just how it is. . . . We want them to understand that if you do it, you pay.

Superintendent O'Reilly listed specific features of the school's success: technological progress (increasing technology available to the staff and students), the literacy partnership with ATU, a countywide technology partnership of elementary media centers, distance learning partnerships with four neighboring districts, community support for the new baseball field and the new baseball programs for all ages, the environmental curriculum focusing on the garden and greenhouse, after-school tutoring and adult computing classes, a new parent involvement coordinator, and significant increases in parent participation.

Although school leadership, staff, and board members consistently mention high morale and pride in school and community as important, they acknowledge that test scores and dropout rates are important indicators of success. They express frustration and concern about test scores and student aspirations. When I asked O'Reilly what he thought the parents wanted, he said, "High school is the hardest to pull off. I think the problem is not a failure to get into universities. It's motivation—that's the problem."

I asked if a good student could get the education he or she needs. He told about one student who will take trigonometry next year. This will be a first for the district, and the course is offered through distance learning. The superintendent once again affirmed that the problem is expectation levels, not lack of capacity to deliver instruction. Board member Aikman said this about expectation levels:

> There's a paradox. You want your students to love where they live and you want them to stay. But if you really want to make something of yourself, you almost have to leave the area to go where the jobs are. This affects expectations. They should want to go to college, to make something of themselves above finishing school and going over to the chicken plants. You're talking about minimum wage jobs and not much potential for growth. I don't know that anybody chooses that, but it happens. A kid thinks, "My mama and dad work there and *they* are happy."

The superintendent agreed, "If it's good enough for my parents, it's good enough for me."

Both superintendent and board president agreed that the dropout rate for high school is a concern because it is a bit higher than the state average yearly rate of three percent. When asked about the reasons for dropping out, O'Reilly said,

> We have changed the academic program the last couple of years quite a bit to address deficiencies and to offer a program that captures the kids' interests and imagination. . . . There are kids who, with their families, are just going through the motions. . . . Another real problem we've been facing is that I don't think the program fits the kids. I didn't have any stock in the school district. I didn't have to cover my tracks. So we've been changing things. . . . For instance, we had no technology three years ago. Now we have more technology than anybody—maybe as good as anybody in the state as far as technological resources for kids—the ability to get to and use technology.

The School's Greatest Challenges

The most critical challenge for the residents of Fourche Valley is the lack of economic opportunity. This challenge manifests itself in the school in the form of "low aspirations." The lack of good jobs locally means that a common incentive to study hard is missing from local reality. In order to realize such incentives students must imagine life elsewhere.

The community leaders, educators, and students I interviewed acknowledged low student aspirations and a limited vision of the future as problems. School staff viewed most residents of the area as complacent about their children's school performance or at best ambivalent about the prospects of their children attaining higher educational levels.

All of those I interviewed expressed empathy for the families whose children leave the area to pursue additional education and better-paid employment. A widely held view was that students who complete postsecondary schooling run the risk of leaving the valley for good, first to attend school and then to secure good paying jobs elsewhere. Certainly, this view is distressing, especially for those local people interested in cultivating an improved academic program.

The school staff I interviewed agreed that they saw the low aspirations of students and their parents as a hindrance to improved performance. I asked the superintendent if he thought they were able to provide a good education for the students. He said, "I don't think that it's the case that the school can't meet the needs of our students who want certain things. I really think that it's the expectation level of the community."

The students I interviewed reported that most of their friends were *not* interested in leaving the area, and that they did not aspire to conventional careers that would take them away from the valley. In describing classmates, one student observed,

> Some go to college, but it's usually like a local college—like Russellville—and they come home on the weekends. Last year 12 (students) graduated, and most of them stayed here. Only one or two went to college out of last year's graduating class.

Evidence of a School Thriving in the Face of Adversity

Despite worries about students' reportedly "low" aspirations, evidence that Fourche Valley High School is thriving was ample and easy to find. I found signs in the school climate and the appearance of the facility. Teachers, staff leaders, and others spoke about their recent progress in using technology and telecommunications and their cooperative work with other small schools on instituting distance education programs. They talked about recent improvements in curriculum and professional development that were facilitating the development of "a true learning community" among teachers. The prevailing attitude suggested to me that the school was operating in a mode of continuous improvement. Both school staff and community members spoke of the increased involvement in the workings of the school not only of parents, but of other community members, as well.

School Climate

The positive climate is noticeable. This manifestation of comfort and care is difficult to simulate, as those who have visited many schools will know. Both teachers and students exhibited *unusual* friendliness and openness toward a casual visitor.

The students in this school were confident that their teachers and their principal wanted them to be there. Remarks made by a long-time consultant to the school confirmed that impression:

> The kids run up to me. They say, "Don't you have time to come to our room? We have something new we want you to see." Or, "Thank you so much for those new books you brought." One of the teachers wrote me a thank-you note that brought tears to my eyes. She wrote, "The changes that are taking place in our classrooms are so good for the children. I see it in their eyes." You know, test scores are great and we have to see those gains, but that's what really counts.

The School Facility

The school facility is modest but beautifully maintained inside and out. Community members have provided the labor for virtually all recent improvements and additions to the physical plant. This includes major projects such as renovation of the vintage gymnasium and construction of a new baseball stadium.

The school facility is an apparent source of pride in the community. And school staff members obviously revere the skills and talents of older community members, not just parents. Cecelia Rice, the school's principal, notes that the gymnasium is one of the oldest in the state, perhaps the oldest. She tells how the community recently refurbished it. (It *really is* beautiful—all bright blue and white with glossy varnished floors.)

> We repainted it last year. We reroofed it. We painted the floor. We painted the bleachers. It got a complete overhaul . . . and it looks nice! Before it looked like the oldest gym. The bleachers were all grey. It was so dark in here. We painted them white. When we have pee-wee games . . . there are 300 people here!

One of the most noticeable things about the school's interior was the brightly colored, permanent artwork, created by professional artists and students. There was also a remarkable lack of commercially produced "school-type" wall decorations so often found in U.S. schools. Both teachers and principal gave much credit for the school's attractiveness to the ATU consultant mentioned earlier, whose work, though

focused on the school's language arts program and adult literacy programs, has broadly influenced the instructional ethos schoolwide.

Telecommunications

The school had made significant progress in technology access and use in the three years previous to my visit. All students have computers in their classrooms, and a computer lab in the library is available for classes of students and adults. The school has constructed an interactive-television classroom and is involved in a distance learning partnership with three other school districts. The four districts are sharing teachers for low-incidence classes such as foreign language and higher-level mathematics. Principal Rice noted,

> Next year we'll be exchanging 10 classes with three other schools. This is just among us [public schools], and no university is involved. . . . For example, *we* have a Spanish teacher and we'll be sending [that is, delivering] classes to two other schools.

Through distance education partnerships, school staff members have begun to realize better ways to serve the needs of unusual students. Superintendent O'Reilly feels that distance education partnerships are critical to the school's capacity to meet the needs of all students. He told about one of their most promising students:

> This one youngster is a smart boy, and next year he's going to be a senior. *Never* in the past could we offer trigonometry. We didn't have someone to teach it. Next year, another district is sending us trigonometry classes for that student and someone else. Well, this is an example of what we're able to do now that we weren't able to do several years ago.

Curriculum and Instruction

Recent improvements to the school's instructional program have centered on the language arts program in all grades, but effects were felt throughout the curriculum. Relevance in curriculum was mentioned frequently by all those interviewed. The principal described it as "a curriculum in tune with the daily lives of students." The school has recently added an environmental studies curriculum and is reinstating a previously abandoned music program.

The school has a large garden, which the fifth and sixth grade students maintain. The vegetables they grow are used in the cafeteria. The principal told about how the year before the students even planted cotton: "They did cotton as a unit, and the kids were just fascinated when it opened. They were looking for someone in the community—just anyone—who could spin cotton, but I don't think they have found anyone yet."

Children were working in the garden. All of them were very friendly, inquisitive, and unusually forthright—absolutely confident that I would be interested in what they were doing. I was introduced as "Miss Pat." The principal asked, "What are you planting?" They shouted in unison, "strawberries and broccoli!" That day they were also planting beans to accompany their carrots, red onions, and watermelons.

The principal and I walked over to a small shed to see the new baby chicks, and she explained, "We just got them last week; they mail them to you. But we had to keep them in the school at first because we had an electric short in the shed. We just got it fixed, and so now they're out here." She asked the teacher what she was going to do with the chickens when they got big. "Are you going to give them to the kids?" she asked.

The teacher said, "We haven't thought that far. We might want to keep them. That's our pen. The kids built this pen. They put the wire around the front." We played with the chicks for a while and the teacher added, "We have to find a way to keep the varmints out."

Pointing out a greenhouse, Rice said, "We got a Wal-Mart grant for that. The kids will start houseplants and bedding plants, like tomatoes, and then we'll sell them to people. We also have some herbs. We don't lock the greenhouse, which is a statement about where we live."

Professional Development and Teacher Learning Community

Improvement of curriculum and instruction are also being addressed through uncommon professional development strategies. For example, one of the high school teachers visited Japan on a fellowship won by the school. Japanese-style artwork created by the students is on display in the school. The teacher had learned the techniques in Japan and had taught them to the children.

Leadership, staff, and consultant spoke of the need to affirm a sense of place while at the same time avoiding parochialism. There is a

conscious effort to professionalize the teaching staff. In talking about professional development and program improvement, one staff member spoke about the overall approach in the following terms:

> We've tried not to say, "OK, we are going to cut dropout rates, we're going to get test scores higher, and we're going to do this in two easy workshops." . . . We are approaching it very slowly, step by step, and (trying) to be sure we understand what we're doing . . . and I think it will be another year before we see a lot of gain in test scores. By the end, I think we will.

Involvement and Engagement by Parents and Community

One of the most striking first impressions of the school is the number of community adults engaged in all sorts of activities. Superintendent O'Reilly described adult involvement in the school:

> Last night we had adult computer classes in our library. The backyard was full of kids and parents for the baseball game. We also had practice for the play. There must have been 50 cars here. You don't have 50 or 60 cars around the schoolhouse when people hate the school. You got three things going on. From that standpoint, the baseball program is new, and that brought people; the computers are new, and that brought people; and the play is new, and that brought people. We didn't use to have plays. That's what I meant by change in the program to capture the kids' interests and to fit their needs more, and I think we're doing that. Is it perfect? No. Is the high school as strong as the elementary school and middle school? No. But it's getting stronger. [Although] high school is the hardest to pull off . . . it is a good measure of the health of the whole school operation.

The school is making concerted efforts to increase the engagement of parents and other community members in the education program, both as supporters of instruction for the children and as active learners themselves. The school has employed a parent involvement coordinator. Adults may attend computer classes. Parents also participated in corrective reading techniques provided by ATU for the school's faculty.

The school is the major—the only—significant source of community entertainment, and staff take this responsibility to heart. On the

day of my visit, in the auditorium, students and teachers in costume were involved in a dress rehearsal for a play that was to be performed for the community in a few days. The stage set looked to me like a professional set designer had created it. The play was advertised in the school newspaper.

School staff have recognized that the person they hired as parent involvement coordinator has tremendous leadership ability, so faculty members are doing all they can to help her realize her capabilities to the fullest. One staff person described some of their efforts:

> She's going with us on some of our school observations. The sole purpose is to see the parent center that they've set up, and I thought this will be a great [opportunity]—even though it's a large community—that's OK. We can see what a really good parent center looks like, and we can take it from there.

Is This School Flourishing?

It appears to me that the primary force behind this school's success is its leadership. I saw leaders who are trusted, leaders who care, leaders who have high expectations, leaders who have seen "what *good* looks like" in schools, leaders who have a broader sense of community, and who know how to network and find resources. These leaders know how to work with others outside the community to obtain additional resources. They know how to develop coalitions to move the community, and how to align community members behind a cause. The charter school movement may have "failed," but it was *successful* in galvanizing community members to work for their school community. Failure isn't usually an absolute setback; from a different perspective, it is most often a step toward success.

Leadership is a curiously dynamic phenomenon, certainly. It requires people who are willing to take responsibility for initiating action, but it also requires people who are willing to vest their trust in "leaders," a trust that can easily be withheld or withdrawn. In talking to the board president and superintendent about this, I said, "Maybe you were lucky." They both replied, "Of course! It's the environment."

The superintendent said, "They would like for us to shine in as many ways as possible."

Larry Aikman said, "Basically, we have the capability to be the best

school. We may *already* be the best in the county. I'm very proud of our little school."

The Superintendent

As noted previously, the superintendent was an outsider and most definitely an urbanite. But he has become an insider, first, by virtue of being married to a native, and second, by his obvious concern for the welfare of both the school and the valley as a whole. He and the school principal seem to have worked out a very effective division of responsibilities. His most important contribution seems to be broadening the community through networking, both with other small school districts and with external agencies willing to provide resources for the school. He is excellent at the art of grantmanship. Although the focus of his energies is outside the community, he maintains good relationships with school staff and community members.

When describing O'Reilly's leadership, board president Aikman said, "The superintendent isn't kidding when he says he has an open-door policy when somebody wants to talk. [However], we try to get people to go through channels—start with teachers and so forth." O'Reilly had been superintendent for four years at the time of the site visit. One staff member said, "Well, he's developing a great track record so we're probably going to lose him." Aikman said, "We're lucky to have had him as long as we have."

The School Principal

Cecelia Rice is truly an extraordinary school principal. It is difficult to imagine many people who could handle the job of both elementary and high school principal with such grace and finesse. Like her father, board president Aikman, and Superintendent O'Reilly, she has the advantage of being an insider in the community with a wider perspective that comes from having lived and worked in other places. She handles virtually all internal school affairs, many that might be handled by a school superintendent elsewhere. Understanding her contributions requires that one acknowledge her high energy and commitment. In addition to her duties as principal of essentially two schools, *she teaches two classes daily and adult computer classes in the evening!* Rice's

principalship looks very different from principalships in most U.S. schools.

The Board President

All districts should be blessed with a person with the experience, wisdom, and energy that Larry Aikman brings to his role as board president. There was no hint of the tendency, which one sometimes finds in rural or small-town boards, to "micro-manage" administration and teaching. Aikman described himself and his role with characteristic humility: "Well, I'm retired from the Army. I'm a crusty old colonel who does manual labor now."

O'Reilly said about Aikman, "He went away for 30 years and then came back. So we're talking about a wealth of experience outside the realm of the valley."

Aikman's personal interest in the valley and his advocacy efforts are a strong and positive influence. His work extends well beyond that of serving as president of the school board. His insights into the value of rural America and his advocacy efforts could serve the interests of all rural schools. In a letter published in the Little Rock *Democratic Gazette* (paraphrased below), he asked a pointed question that can be applied to rural America in general:

> Do the people in the State of Arkansas have an obligation to send money to rural areas where it is not feasible for the kids to go to school somewhere else? We cover 250 square miles. That is a big area. Neighboring schools are over an hour from here. Some of our kids get on the bus at 6:10 a.m. already. So the question is, "What are we contributing to the rest of Arkansas that should make them feel a little bit of an obligation to support us?" Well, where does the timber come from? You can stand out here any day of the week and see log truck after log truck go by. Where are they going? Most are going to another saw mill. Saw mill workers there are working with materials that the wood from our area created the jobs for. So they make a buck. Now how many times does a dollar change hands? Seven times, isn't it? That's generally what they figure.

The School-University Partnership

Fourche Valley has established a long-term partnership with Arkansas Tech University. ATU is a regional comprehensive state university, founded in 1909 to serve the rural northwest quadrant of Arkansas. The people served by ATU are mostly from rural areas. Today ATU enrolls approximately 4,700 students in 44 programs of study at the associate, baccalaureate, and master's levels.

The purpose of the FVSD-ATU partnership is to improve literacy in the valley. Through its ongoing relationship with ATU, the school has been able to improve its language arts program and, more generally, to sponsor an ethos of concerted instructional improvement.

The strength and quality of this school-university partnership cannot be separated from the personal leadership of the primary university consultant to FVSD. Her assistance and insight are valuable resources in the Fourche Valley School. Again, we see a person who not only has professional expertise, but who has the cultural values essential to maintaining productive relationships among the faculty of the Fourche Valley School and the communities it serves (and the community it *constitutes*).

A Positive Effect of State Standards

In describing the teaching staff at Fourche Valley School, Superintendent O'Reilly said,

> One thing that is special about this school is the fact that we have been able to hire a much higher grade of candidates, including Mrs. Rice. They are of a much higher caliber talent-wise, ability-wise, than they had four years ago when I first got here. That's all I can say. We're able to attract pretty good candidates.

Rice said, "Five years ago, our pay wasn't competitive. So [in recruiting new teachers] we were asking people to move to nowhere *and* take less money. But now we're very competitive: we have small classes, we have technology, so we're getting good ones." This change did not happen solely because of local initiative. Aikman observed, "That [salary improvement] was forced on us, by the way. They established at

the last legislative sessions that we pay a minimum salary."

I asked, "So did you have to tax the people here, or did you get more funds from the state?" O'Reilly said,

> It was a combination of things. We got more from the state. We've been able to spend some grant money on some stuff, which saves our other money. So we've done it three or four different ways. It's helped us quite a bit. The state says you have to spend this much money, and they are essentially trying to force some schools out of business. It's not the fact that the teachers don't deserve it. But we all knew that was the motivation behind the bill. They were able to raise the salary $10,000 in three years. Sometimes state standards can be positive forces. When the district had to comply, the community found ways to make it happen.

Discussion

I would call what I saw at FVSD a state of "tenuous sustainability." The school has the characteristics to flourish and thrive, but the school district's continued survival depends on the continuing economic viability of the valley. And the existence of the school depends on the district's ability to hold the state's advocates of consolidation at bay. The school and community reportedly battle state pressure to consolidate because, community members told me, consolidation would seriously injure, if not demolish, the sense of common purpose that the school engenders in the valley. At the same time, valley residents and educators work hard to provide schooling that is responsive to community needs and relevant to the lives of both children and adults.

If the district enjoyed the wholehearted support of the state instead of encountering its continual resistance, could they do more? Or is the state's resistance like the wind against the wings of Immanuel Kant's dove—a negative force that actually encourages and enables the school district and its community to fly? Reality is not simple, and outcomes have multiple causes. Not all the intended causes are productive, nor do all the seemingly counterproductive measures yield counterproductive results in the end.

There is surely a place for educational standards. But the simplistic approach of directly or indirectly threatening some small schools with

closure as a supposed route to fiscal efficiency has long been discredited, as has the argument that larger school size consistently improves the quality of education. In fact, there is much information to suggest an inverse relationship between size and quality of education where impoverished communities are concerned.

The district's continued viability appears to depend on either keeping the current leaders or finding new ones who will continue the work already begun and who possess strengths and abilities similar to those of the present leaders. Still, there is a palpably tenuous feeling about the current leadership. For example, rumors circulated that the superintendent might leave for work in a larger district. Also, while I believe the university's influence will remain a legacy for some time, were the ATU literacy consultant to discontinue her work at FVSD, the district would have to find a replacement to resume these critical efforts. Perhaps I sell the community short. Perhaps new strengths would emerge in any case. The community members have certainly demonstrated their ability to assemble and support their current leaders.

So much depends on economic development in the area that one wonders if the school can do all that it seems it must. If there were a chamber of commerce with the dynamic and caring leadership exhibited in the school, might it improve conditions in the local economy? What improvements would serve the community best? It is not easy to say.

At the very least, the people of Fourche Valley should not have to justify constantly the existence of their community while simultaneously seeking to improve their conditions. Fourche Valley residents should be confident that the state and our society value their small community. As a nation, surely we do not want to engineer a country of densely populated metropolitan centers surrounded by near wastelands in which healthy communities are not sustainable.

Conclusion

This study raises the question of suitable expectations for a school situated in a geographically isolated community, a community that is unwilling or unable to incorporate in order to provide services and leadership separate from the school. In the case of Fourche Valley, the school is more than a school building or even a "learning community."

In its operation, it reconstitutes the several communities of the valley into one larger (though still small!) community.

The school, however, cannot continue to exist if these small communities cannot remain viable. The district (the territory and communities enclosed by the FVSD) requires locally appropriate economic development. According to the theories of Cornelia and Jan Flora and those of Robert Putnam, the FVSD exhibits both social capital and features of "entrepreneurial community." These features attest to an already existing potential for economic development. If state education policy encouraged and supported the combination of school program development and community economic development, the district would more easily fulfill its apparent mission as an organizing force in the valley.

Notes

1. This case study was conducted by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory as part of the Laboratory Network Program funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement. Dr. Hadden is now an educational consultant in Austin, Texas.
2. The school's address is Briggsville, approximately 40 miles southwest of I-40 from Russelville. Briggsville is 53 miles east of the Oklahoma border.
3. See, for example, J. Sher, ed., *Education in Rural America: A Reassessment of the Conventional Wisdom* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1977).
4. J. Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1980).
5. The National Center for Education Statistics, *Common Core of Data (CCD): School Years 1993-94 through 1997-98* (CD-ROM; NCES 2000-370). (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 2000), reports that of the 70 students enrolled in grades 7-12 of Fourche Valley High School in 1997-98, 66 were non-Hispanic Whites and 4 were Hispanics.
6. A number of well-known rural writers now advise able rural youngsters *against* pursuing higher education. Gene Logsdon, for instance, in his popular book *The Contrary Farmer* (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green, 1993, p. 25) writes, "If your goal is cottage farm contentment, *some of the most unnecessary money you can spend is for a college degree* (Logsdon's emphasis)." Logsdon is leader of the small-farm movement in the United States and has written about farming for decades.
7. The editors have honored the consultant's request to remain anonymous throughout this chapter.
8. In many rural districts around the nation, in the editors' experience, the state department of education is regarded first, as ignorant of rural conditions, and second, as careless about its expectations for policy implementation in rural areas.

Rural districts, in our experience, voice concerns that are similar to those of city districts but generally lack the political influence to press their points very strongly either at the state department of education or in the legislature. This observation may help explain why state equity suits (a judicial rather than legislative strategy) have so often originated with coalitions of rural districts.

9. See M. Raywid, *Current Literature on Small Schools* (ERIC Digest) (Charleston, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, 1999), ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 425 049, for the most recent review of related literature.

10. C. B. Flora and J. L. Flora, "Entrepreneurial Social Infrastructure: A Necessary Ingredient," *Annals of the Academy of Political and Social Science* 529: 48-58 (1993); and R. D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).

Chapter 8

How These Schools Flourish Differently

Craig B. Howley, Patricia D. Hadden, and Hobart L. Harmon

The case studies in the preceding chapters touch on issues and themes that will be familiar to educators anywhere, but they also reference themes and issues peculiar to rural places. In today's urban-minded and cosmopolitan culture, rural people comprise an often overlooked minority. In this chapter the editors want to highlight what is uniquely rural in these stories and tie these observations to the views ("theories") of leading scholars.

The chapter first considers the character of these four schools. Instead of presuming that they represent an abstract quality (such as "excellence"), the discussion asks, "How are these schools different?" Next, the chapter connects the findings from the case studies to three recent and theoretically salient perspectives on rural communities, social capital, and school leadership. Finally, the chapter concludes with editorial reflections on the importance of articulating rural priorities for rural schools.

The Character of Flourishing High Schools in Rural Communities

The schools in these case studies perhaps adhere less to societal norms and more to community norms of schooling. National themes

are visible, but community members almost always view them through distinctive community lenses. Other educators or political leaders who view this issue from more cosmopolitan perspectives might not willingly claim Oneida High School, Wahluke High School, Thrasher K-12 School, or Fourche Valley High School as examples of flourishing American schools.

All of the communities served by these schools are impoverished in both statistical terms and on the basis of arguably objective evidence. At the same time, the differences in the nature of local "poverty" point up the various community strengths on which these school enterprises can draw. In each case, it seems, the leadership teams serving at the time of our visits were able to marshal a variety of resources to make improvements. The nature of the improvements differs from site to site, as would be expected. According to many rural school reform observers, the diversity that characterizes rural America often alters the character of school improvement efforts.[1]

Class and race in a rural community. The improvement plan in Wahluke High School (Mattawa, WA) included the concerted local effort to convince state agencies to open a local high school, partly on the basis of population growth expected as the result of irrigation projects. This effort, which was lengthy, seems to have also resulted in significant capacity building. The success of the effort to establish the school and the subsequent growth of the local economy, of course, have entailed new challenges. In a rather remote, previously Anglo-majority area, new labor and class patterns have emerged, with attendant language and ethnic issues associated with settled-out migrant labor. Successful graduates are reportedly leaving the area; indeed success is often measured as the ability to leave the area. Rural scholars would question the implications of such "success" on the community of Mattawa (or any other places similarly affected). Will the town be sustained by settled-out migrant workers whose children, too, will merely be passing through on their way to presumably better lives? Will class divisions widen or narrow?

Among these four cases, the Wahluke story exhibits perhaps the most distressing features. The district occupies a literally contested place, the town of Mattawa having been appropriated years earlier by the federal government for a nuclear reactor. The return of a portion of

the town's land and the coming of irrigation have amplified, rather than muted or resolved, this contest. On the one hand, the town and district are more fortunate than many rural areas, because "development" has brought growth and jobs. Yet, as the case study claims, the town and district must now confront the gap between the haves and the have-nots, a gap that is all the more delicate because it involves linguistic and cultural differences. Wahluke is struggling with some of the very challenges that confront large city districts. Yet, perhaps it has the advantage of smaller scale to help tip the odds in favor of justice. According to the case study, the new residents of Mattawa are committed to making it their home. As with all these places, the stories and struggles continue.

Remoteness as a rural image. Fourche Valley High School (Briggsville, AR) presents a quite different picture. In some ways, this case may represent the typical—though usually sentimentalized—image of rural education: remote, scenic, and agrarian in an old-fashioned way. This case study, however, strips away the sentimentality and shows that life in the communities of the valley is difficult. Despite the difficulties, the population is not declining, and some jobs—in timber and meatpacking—are locally available. As in Wahluke, increased community involvement and support for the school stemmed from a crisis: the strong but thwarted effort to establish a charter school. As in Wahluke, this impressive effort probably contributed to local capacity building. The Fourche Valley improvement program obviously seeks to overcome the possible disadvantages of remoteness. The work of the university partner, visitations to other schools, distance learning, and the Japanese art work are examples. The district leadership is also remarkably connected to the outside world while enjoying very strong local roots. The leadership serving at the time of the visit seemed well positioned to appreciate the wider context in which this unique district existed. But here, too, we find the contest between "higher aspirations" and a desire to hold onto home.

Prior to starting the work reported in this book, the members of the research team helped conduct a national survey of rural students, teachers, and parents about sustaining local communities as an educational priority. The results were not encouraging. Individual goals oriented toward careers and personal advancement widely prevailed

over care for local community and the common good.[2] Howley and Harmon, contributing to a related project, found that gifted students in one rural state were notably conflicted over this issue, exhibiting both strong local attachments and "high aspirations" for conventional careers.[3]

Small schools in a county district. Throughout the Southeast, from West Virginia to Louisiana, schooling is often organized in countywide districts. This form of school district organization is unfamiliar to educators and citizens who live elsewhere (for example, in the Midwest and New England), where districts often cross county lines.

Closure and consolidation with other schools is an ever-present threat to small schools in many such county systems. Thrasher School (Booneville, MS) would seem to present an almost ideal target for such a closure, all else being equal.[4] Thrasher is a short distance from another school in the Prentiss County, Mississippi district. It is one of the 1,000 or so remaining K-12 unit schools in the United States that serve children of all ages under one roof.[5] Once popular in rural areas, these small schools have been closed to create larger schools organized into the far more popular elementary, middle, and secondary grade spans. Conventional wisdom has regarded small K-12 schools as troublesome for many reasons, including inadequate curriculum, outdated construction, difficulty in providing special services, and fiscal inefficiencies.

Thrasher remains open in part because of the devotion of its community, but there is evidence that all of the communities of Prentiss County share this devotion to their small schools; the case study reports a change in superintendency resulting from an unsuccessful consolidation campaign. Like Fourche Valley, Thrasher serves a largely blue collar community where labor and manual work are valued. Unlike Fourche Valley, however, Thrasher School leaders seem less apt to equate success with increasing aspirations that inspire youth to leave the area.[6]

Trading up with the outside world. In all four districts, the case studies suggest varying awareness of and interactions with the outside world. Whatever disruptions to rural ways of life the twentieth century has brought—and they have been sharp and painful according to some of the case studies—the people we spoke with in these places exhibited a marked awareness of their difference from the urban societal norm of

life and schooling. Leadership in these local places also interpreted that connection differently in each place.

Oneida, as a trading community, seems to sense the potential in "trading up"—that is, interacting with and integrating the influences of—an outside world on which it nonetheless retains a critical outlook. Rather than willingly taking the bad with the good from the wider world, Oneidans seem to want the good without the bad. They seem to have achieved a measure of success. Perhaps their experience with the boom and bust cycles of the coal economy has sharpened their collective judgement.

Willingness to interact with the outside world is probably an outgrowth of the fact that Oneida has sustained itself as a trading community for generations, passing largely intact through the boom and bust periods that have made—and then permanently *unmade*—many rural communities in the past 200 years. Interestingly, Oneida adults and young people view the concept of "trading up" in two ways: first, many students need to leave Oneida temporarily to learn skills that they can use in careers when they return home. This concept emerges as a strongly articulated value for both young people and their parents. Second, town leaders and citizens believe strongly that *they* must struggle to develop local enterprises to which young people *can* return. Thus, the foundation of trading up seems to rest on a solid, yet continually evolving local identity. The purpose of education in Oneida seems to be the continued evolution of that identity across generations.

Excellence in rural schooling. Typically, excellence has been viewed since the middle 1980s as "world-class" practice and accomplishment. More recently, numerous educational theorists have begun to dispute the implications of using world-class standards as a yardstick of educational excellence. David Orr, who has written extensively about the need to rebuild rural communities, argues that

> Plato or Thomas Jefferson would scarcely have recognized the reasons being given for educational reforms, which mostly aim to make our young scholars a "world-class work force" in order to make our economy more competitive in international markets. It is American brand names that we want on the next generation of land-filled consumer trash and junk, not those of other countries.[7]

World-class standards, according to Orr, inevitably lead people to disown, if not destroy, the places where they live and to regard the entire world as merely raw material on its way to the trash heap. The effects on rural places of standards that implement such values, he claims, have been especially disastrous. Orr's agenda for school reform rests on the keen insight that "the answer to poor schools is to create better communities that take their children and their long-term prospects seriously regardless of the cost."[8] Clearly, Orr is pursuing a very different theory of school reform than the one usually presented to educators. In his theory, schools need to serve local communities for the long term. This view might be distinguished from the more familiar prevailing view, classified under the rubric *communitarian*.[9]

We did not ask our contacts to nominate rural schools that reflected a communitarian vision of excellence, but the four case studies given here exhibit distinct qualities of this vision. Our research protocol, of course, referenced community connections, but it did not predispose those we interviewed to give answers consonant with a communitarian perspective. Indeed, it is quite unlikely that many—if any—of our respondents were familiar with communitarian theories of society or of school reform.[10]

We are therefore inclined to hypothesize that excellence in rural schools—at least in schools in small, relatively impoverished rural districts—looks quite different from excellence conceived as "world-class." Indeed, an articulate minority of school reformers (who are not very interested in rural education) is increasingly calling for diversity in school operations, structure, and outcomes that is grounded in local community.[11]

Given the apparent communitarian vision of excellence evident in our four case studies, we want to conclude this chapter with some speculation about the circumstances that might cause small rural schools in modest circumstances to flourish. The concluding discussion therefore considers three theoretical constructs related to community sustainability.

Three Theoretical Constructs

The theoretical approaches that address community issues appear relevant to understanding what might be done in places like those we

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visited. The first theory helps explain processes that may be at work in the rural communities surrounding these schools. A grounded theory, developed by Jan and Cornelia Flora and colleagues at Iowa State University, focuses on entrepreneurial communities (that is, communities that can sustain themselves and thrive). The second theoretical perspective may help explain the connections that seem to prevail across the boundaries of schoolhouse and community in the study sites. Social capital theory, especially as developed by Robert Putnam and James Coleman, focuses on social relations among people in a community that create conditions favorable for community cohesion in accomplishing common goals. Finally, our third suggested theoretical perspective provides an ethical view of the sort of school leadership described most persistently by Thomas Sergiovanni, which might well be at work in the study schools. This perspective views school and community leadership as a form of stewardship.

Entrepreneurial communities. In varying degrees and at varying times, the communities we studied have suffered from the same weakened economic and social conditions that have affected many, if not most, communities across rural America since its settlement by Europeans. Although these conditions have worsened in recent decades and have led to the disintegration of many once-viable communities, a major study of rural communities found that some rural communities are surviving and thriving.[12] These "entrepreneurial communities" exhibit some common characteristics that enable the success of local initiative.

Flora and Flora synthesized these characteristics into three dimensions.[13] The Floras contend that, in addition to leadership and an adequate physical infrastructure, a community must possess these other dimensions:

- *Symbolic diversity*, which implies that a variety of persons are willing and able to provide leadership and that other community members accept the leadership function as necessary and positive.
- *Resource mobilization*, which requires that the community either have sufficient resources available or that community members know how to obtain them and, further, that they are willing to invest private capital locally.

- *Quality of linkages*, which implies strong social cohesiveness and the capability to define community broadly, a capacity which requires networking[14] within the community, between the communities and other communities like it, and with external agencies.

Among our four studies, Fourche Valley is the only one in which the school is the primary public institution common to distinct and separate population enclaves. If we view the district as "the community" and compare what we found there with the characteristics described by the Floras, we find clear evidence of the "entrepreneurial community." But it is important to recognize that even in places like Oneida, where the school does not actually comprise the community per se, the school can still serve an important role in representing, organizing, and leading local commitments and purposes.

Social capital theory. Another way to view the development of this organizing and leading role of rural schools is through the lens of *social capital theory*. Social capital describes relationships that facilitate collective action within groups of people.[15] It represents resources that have value, just as financial and human capital do. Robert D. Putnam, a political scientist credited with much of the early development of social capital theory, insists that "certain communities do not enjoy a more vital civic life because they are prosperous, but they are prosperous *because* they have a vital civic life."[16] This position on civic life is quite similar to David Orr's position on school reform.

If Putnam is correct, then all the social network development evident in these four case studies may, in the long run, contribute to long-term improvements in the quality of life in these communities and to the ultimate ability to sustain both the schools and the various communities organized in and around the schools.

Stewardship. This construct is about leadership. It may be the leadership construct most germane to rural schools and communities of the sort profiled here. In a rapid-fire series of works, Thomas Sergiovanni, has advocated the importance of leadership as stewardship.[17] Though many works on environmental education and the Judeo-Christian ministry discuss stewardship, Sergiovanni is among a very small number of authors writing about the concept as it pertains to school administration. Like the theorists of social capital, however, Sergiovanni has evinced little interest in rural schooling or rural communities per se.

Sergiovanni's work contrasts the typical practice of school leadership, which is often custodial, controlling, and even dictatorial, with stewardship. Stewardship aims at developing and guarding the common purposes that a school-community defines for itself. While most writing about school administration is founded directly on works developed originally for American businesses, Sergiovanni cautions that such importations are inappropriate for educational leadership, where the key concept must be the *common good.*[18]

For Sergiovanni, the common good and community are the very things over which stewardship presides. Like many of the rural critics of contemporary schooling, Sergiovanni regards the issue of *who benefits* from current practices as an open question; he is unwilling to take for granted that *concern* for all children translates into actual *benefits* for all children. Moreover, according to Sergiovanni, the beneficiaries of leadership are too often the leaders themselves rather than the organizations (that is, schools or school districts) that they lead.

This perspective on educational leadership seems consonant with some of the actual practices we observed in the four small rural high schools we visited. It comes as no surprise to us that Sergiovanni has developed a strong ethical argument for creating (and sustaining) smaller schools throughout the United States.

Honoring Rural Priorities: A Reflection on Community and Educational Purpose

Recently a prominent education policymaker in an industrial midwestern state addressed an audience of rural teachers and administrators. He encouraged increased college attendance rates. He wanted to see much higher achievement in mathematics and science. He insisted on "higher" aspirations. He talked about the types of jobs available in Midwestern cities, the changing nature of the global economy, and the importance of education in securing not only a competitive edge for the United States, but for the economy of his one state over states such as Texas and North Carolina.

While the audience listened politely, many in attendance later said they felt patronized. All taught in and, for the most part, had been raised in the impoverished rural communities of this state. They were skeptical that their children and grandchildren (and their students)

would find pleasant, challenging, or fulfilling work in global enterprises located in distant cities and suburbs.

Indeed, many rural people remain unconvinced that globalization promises improvements, especially for impoverished places. Often, it seems, rural communities have suffered at the hands of national priorities. When national and international priorities pay little or no regard to rural priorities and commitments, the likelihood of harm is probably increased. Failure to understand, appreciate, and honor the rural circumstance doubtless has enormous negative policy consequences for rural schooling and rural communities.[19]

Evidence of these consequences exists in the case studies. The town of Mattawa was appropriated in its entirety by the federal government in the 1940s in order to establish the Hanford Nuclear Reactor. Residents were removed and the school was closed. Later, dam construction—part of large regional and national economic initiatives at the time—dramatically changed the face of local agriculture. The result is the current dilemma of schooling in Mattawa: most students are children of the Mexican American agricultural workers who tend the orchards. An unasked question in this story concerns the beneficiaries of these changes. We are not attempting to answer that question here, but we do note that the changes seem to have created a wider gap between the haves and have-nots in Mattawa. Certainly the disbanding of a rural town is not an episode that encourages local sustainability. Mattawa's reconstitution seems to redress the previous harm in ways that leave open the question of common purpose versus private gain. Yet, the people of Mattawa have returned and they persist. Both longtime and new residents inherited a project they could not avoid—how best to realize the common good locally. They can engage this work well or badly, but they cannot avoid doing something. The community disappeared once. It could disappear again.

The people of all these places are managing a dilemma that is common throughout rural America and rural places worldwide; a dilemma perhaps inherent in the human condition. In *The Country and the City*, Raymond Williams defines the dilemma:

> The question we have to put . . . is not whether some men emerged and survived—they will always do so, under any pressures—but whether, taken as a whole,

> the [rural] way of life could sustain a general independence. That, after all, is the test of community, as opposed to occasional private independence.[20]

Thomas Jefferson shared Williams's concern nearly 200 years previously. In his vision, a healthy America required a populated countryside in which the people enjoyed just such a "general independence."[21]

Though the Midwestern education official referred to above did not know it or appreciate its significance, he was showing either his ignorance of or resolute disregard for the priorities that characteristically distinguish rural commitments from cosmopolitan ones. Rural people are willing to make many bargains (and often the best they can get are still bad bargains) in order to remain close to where they were born and to the people they love. Many people in the audience had made such bargains. If the speaker was aware of this, his listeners did not know it or sense it.[22]

As fewer and fewer of us grow up in a single place or settle near extended families, within an easy drive, this rural priority appears more and more strange, if not altogether backward. Listen again to what the citizens of Oneida, Tennessee, told us:

> Tradition comes down through uncles, grandparents, great-grandparents, [people who] went to school here, and they're still here, and [now] their grandchildren or their nephews or their own children are going [to Oneida High School].

We imagine that only a minority of existing schools (including rural schools) are in a position to assert such profound connections with their communities. In many places, nothing that is recognizable as a functional community exists any longer.[23] Instead of tapping the strength of real communities, schools are left to create "learning communities" or "virtual communities." In the usual case, schools construe "the community" as the residential areas from which they draw students.

Instead of community, we more and more experience a manufactured national culture created to sustain national markets.[24] This is the "society" we come to know, though we cannot physically enter these influential institutions, nor can we influence them directly. Our influence takes two forms: voting and shopping.

Society is a domain of anonymity, except for celebrities. It is everywhere, but it is also nowhere, and in this sense (of anonymity and

ubiquity), the national society can be viewed as placeless. It must be placeless to be nearly the same anywhere.

What does this have to do with rural schooling? In his book, *The Life and Death of a Rural American High School: Farewell, Little Kanawha,* Alan DeYoung argues that schools (including too many rural schools) strip away the character of local places by schooling children to live somewhere else. He writes,

> Contemporary American public institutions, including schools, stand in opposition to [a high regard for one's place on earth]. It is their intent to create knowable and predictable people across entire nations and economies, not regional ones.[25]

Rural education scholars like DeYoung and Paul Theobald believe that consideration of "the community" is too often *instrumental*, focusing on what the district needs to get from voters. Too seldom is it *substantive*, focusing on how the school can help sustain the locality of which it is, or should be, an important part. The focus on *voters* (implying that voting is the most important civic action citizens engage in) perhaps reveals the shallowness of many educators' concern for actual community—for the substantive common good.

These four small schools exist in circumstances that define their characters uniquely. They deserve to be sustained and to flourish. Foreclosing their right to exist diminishes the liberty of all citizens. Americans need such schools not merely to continue but to flourish because this is the nature of preserving and advancing the common good of both the small community and the "outside" world. The common good cannot be fashioned from sameness, but requires a constant appreciation of alternatives.

Notes

1. See A. DeYoung, *The Life and Death of a Rural American High School: Farewell, Little Kanawha* (New York: Garland, 1995); D. Orr, *Earth in Mind: On Education, Environment, and the Human Prospect* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 1994); and M. Porter, "Moving Mountains: Reform, Resistance, and Resiliency in an Appalachian Kentucky High School," *Dissertation Abstracts International (A)* 57(12): 5008 (1997). University Microfilms No. AAT 9714177.

2. J. Ley, S. Nelson, and S. Beltyukova, "Congruence of Aspirations of Rural Youth with Expectations Held by Parents and School Staff," *Journal of Research in Rural Education* 12(3): 133-41 (1996).

3. C. Howley and H. Harmon, "K-12 Unit Schooling in Rural America: A First Description," *The Rural Educator* 22(1): 10-18 (2000).

4. R. Bickel and C. Howley, "The Influence of Scale on Student Performance: A Multi-Level Extension of the Matthew Principle," *Education Policy Analysis Archives* [On-line serial] 8(22). http://olam.ed.asu.edu/epaa/v8n22.html (2000); A. DeYoung and C. Howley, "The Political Economy of Rural School Consolidation," Peabody Journal of Education 67(4): 63-89 (1992); and E. Haller and D. Monk, "New Reforms, Old Reforms, and the Consolidation of Small Rural Schools," *Educational Administration Quarterly* 24(4): 470-83 (1988).

5. See Howley and Harmon, "K-12 Unit Schooling in Rural America."

6. In *The Hidden Wound*, a book that considers the issue of racism in rural Kentucky, Wendell Berry strongly questions the American credulity about "higher" aspirations (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1970, pp. 65-70). In Berry's view, it is a profound misconception, and terrible hubris, to imagine that the destiny of a physician or a professor is necessarily finer than the destiny of a mechanic, a rural teacher, or a farmer. Character underlies the exercise of one's calling and inevitably guides one's contributions to the common good in Berry's estimation. Which aspirations are "high" and which "low" is a much more complex question than is usually acknowledged in research about aspirations.

7. See Orr, *Earth in Mind*.

8. Ibid.

9. The communitarian movement, advanced by A. Etzioni in *Rights and the Common Good: The Communitarian Perspective*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995) rests on the premise that strong rights presume strong responsibility.

10. See, for example, P. Theobald, *Teaching the Commons: Place, Pride, and the Renewal of Community* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997).

11. See, for example, S. Arons, *A Short Route to Chaos*. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997); D. Meier, "Can the Odds Be Changed?" *Phi Delta Kappan* 79(5): 358-62 (1998); and T. Sizer, "Better High Schools: What Would Create Them?" *New England Journal of Public Policy* 10(1): 29-35 (1994).

12. C. Flora and J. Flora, "Developing Entrepreneurial Communities," *Sociological Practice* 8: 197-207 (1990).

13. C. Flora and J. Flora, "Entrepreneurial Social Infrastructure: A Necessary Ingredient," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 529: 48-58 (1993).

14. Through such networking, communities can make more efficient use of resources internally and get help and needed resources from external sources.

15. J. Coleman, "Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital." *American Journal of Sociology* 94 (supplement): S95-S120 (1988).

16. R. Putnam, "What Makes Democracy Work?" *National Civic Review*, pp. 101-107 (1993).

17. See, for example, T. Sergiovanni, *Moral Leadership: Getting to the Heart of School Improvement* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1992); "Frames of Leadership," *International Journal of Educational Reform* 2(1): 19-26 (1993); "Organizations or Communities? Changing the Metaphor Changes the Theory," *Educational Administra-*

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tion Quarterly 30 (2): 214-26 (1994); "The Politics of Virtue: A New Compact for Leadership in Schools," *School Community Journal* 5(2): 13-22 (1995); and *Leadership for the Schoolhouse: How Is It Different? Why Is It Important?* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996).

18. See, for example, P. Senge's immensely popular book, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* (New York: Doubleday, 1990) which, incidentally, does consider the concept of stewardship. Also, see P. Theobald's *Teaching the Commons: Place, Pride, and the Renewal of Community* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1997) for a particularly rural interpretation of the importance of the common good.

19. J. Mander and E. Goldsmith, *The Case Against the Global Economy and for a Turn Toward the Local* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1996); W. Berry, *What Are People For?* (San Francisco: North Point, 1990)and *Unsettling America,* 3d ed., (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1990); A. DeYoung, *The Life and Death of a Rural American High School*; and D. Orr, *Earth in Mind.*

20. R. Williams, *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 101.

21. See Theobald, *Teaching the Commons.*

22. For considerations of specific rural priorities keyed to educational research, see C. Howley, "How to Make Rural Educational Research 'Rural': An Essay at Practical Advice," *Journal of Research in Rural Education* 13(2): 131-38 (1997). For a consideration keyed to rural practice see A. Howley, C. Howley, and E. Pendarvis, "The Possible Good Gifted Programs in Rural Schools and Communities Might Do," in *Gifted Education in Cultural Contexts*, ed. J. Borland (New York: Teachers College Press, in press).

23. Theobald, *Teaching the Commons*; Orr, *Earth in Mind*; and R. Williams, *The Politics of Modernism* (London: Verso, 1989).

24. See F. Tönnies, *Community and Society* trans. C. Loomis (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1957).

25. DeYoung, *The Life and Death of a Rural American High School.*

CHAPTER 9

Organizational Resources for Sustaining and Improving Small Rural High Schools

CRAIG B. HOWLEY

Many resources relevant to sustaining small schools can be found in chapter 6 of *Sustainable Small Schools: A Handbook for Rural Communities*, published by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools in 1997 (see description on pages 175-176 below). That chapter is organized into eight sections: partnership, coalition building, needs assessment, consolidation, featured curriculum options, resources from regional educational laboratories, tools for finding information, and rural education organizations.

In this chapter, we repeat only a few of the resources listed in that earlier work. You'll also note that the organization of this chapter is quite different. Our main concern here is helping community and district leaders plan, in order to sustain or to build *small high schools*. We also want to help leaders exercise the stewardship necessary to see these schools positively *flourish*. Finally, we provide information about organizations concerned with the major themes and issues reflected in the case studies. For the purposes of this chapter, these include the following:

- policy
- community engagement

- school facilities for rural communities
- school and curricular leadership

Policy

The resources listed below are intended to help local leaders of all sorts find ways to create policies that actively foster the sustainability and improvement of small rural schools. Most of the groups listed are national organizations, but many of them include links to state organizations on their Web sites. In fact, we have chosen to feature organizations that are highly accessible via the World Wide Web. Practically all of them feature useful publications, information, and connections pertinent to making good policy.

We have selected the following organizations for this section:

- Rural School and Community Trust Policy Program
- National Conference of State Legislatures
- National School Boards Association
- American Association of School Administrators
- Education Commission of the States
- Council of Chief State School Officers
- National Association of State Boards of Education
- Rural Policy Research Institute
- Consortium for Policy Research in Education
- *Education Policy Analysis Archives*
- National Center for Education Statistics

Most of the organizations listed in this section advocate on behalf of certain policy issues. As you will see, however, only a few advocate specifically for sustaining and improving small high schools and small school districts.

Please note that the last four organizations listed (RUPRI, CPRE, *EPAA*, and NCES) provide information relevant to policy but *do not* sponsor advocacy efforts. We have included them in this section because the information they provide describes "the big picture" of the

system of schooling, often with particular emphasis on state or federal policy efforts, or on portraying the various states and the nation as a whole.

The groups included on this list are prominent organizations that either have a *significant direct influence* on policymaking (particularly those at the beginning of the list) or assemble *knowledge and information* that will be helpful to efforts to influence policy.[1]

Rural School and Community Trust Policy Program (Rural Trust)
Policy Program Office

Rural Trust Policy Program
2 S. Main St., Randolph, VT 05060
voice 802-728-5899; fax 802-728-2011
e-mail policy.program@ruraledu.org; Web: http://www.ruraledu.org

National Office

1825 K St., NW, Ste. 703, Washington, DC 20006
voice 202-955-7177; fax 202-955-7179
e-mail info@ruraledu.org

From the Rural Trust home page: "Our Mission: To enlarge student learning and to improve community life by strengthening relationships between rural schools and communities and engaging students in community-based public work." The Rural Trust operates a policy program that is working to inform educators, citizens, and civic leaders about such issues as consolidation, small schools, and rural school busing. The Rural Trust newsletter is available in printed and on-line formats. Subscriptions are available from the Web site. The organization invites the active involvement of local citizens and leaders.

American Association of School Administrators (AASA)

801 N. Moore St., Arlington, VA 22209
voice 703-528-0700; fax 703-841-1543
e-mail karfstrom@aasa.org (Rural and Small Schools Initiative)
Web: http://www.aasa.org

From the AASA Web page: "AASA, founded in 1865, is the professional organization for over 14,000 educational leaders across

North America and in many other countries. AASA's mission is to support and develop effective school system leaders who are dedicated to the highest quality public education for all children. The four major focus areas for AASA are: improving the condition of children and youth, preparing schools and school systems for the 21st century, connecting schools and communities, and enhancing the quality and effectiveness of school leaders."

Local school district superintendents are the primary constituency for the AASA. The organization publishes *The School Administrator* and advocates a variety of positions. AASA is one of the few professional organizations that prominently maintains an initiative for rural and small schools (http://www.aasa.org/Advocacy/rural_initiative.htm). A major goal of the initiative is to secure a special federal funding stream to small school districts, defined in this case as those enrolling fewer than 600 students.

National School Boards Association (NSBA)

1680 Duke St., Alexandria, VA 22314
voice 703-838-6722; fax 703-683-7590
e-mail info@nsba.org; Web: http://www.nsba.org/

Excerpts from the NSBA mission and vision statements: "The mission of the National School Boards Association, working with and through all of its federation members, equity in public education through school board leadership. . . . The Association believes local school boards are the nation's preeminent expression of grass roots. . . . By focusing on raising student achievement and by actively engaging the community, school boards will provide leadership for academic success in the nation's public schools."

The NSBA advocates on behalf of local school boards and maintains an action agenda and a variety of programs to support the work of local boards of education. It publishes *American School Board Journal.* School construction and education funding are currently among the seven NSBA legislative priorities. Connections to school and district size are implicit, but small schools are not a specific priority for NSBA as of this writing.

Education Commission of the States (ECS)

707 17th St., #2700, Denver, CO 80202-3427
voice 303-299-3600; fax 303-296-8332
e-mail ecs@ecs.org; Web: http://www.ecs.org

The ECS mission statement follows: "The mission of the Education Commission of the States is to help state leaders identify, develop and implement public policy for education that addresses current and future needs of a learning society." The primary constituents of the ECS are state policymakers. The ECS Web site is searchable, and because of the organization's state-level mission, *documents on the Web site can be searched by state.* This makes it comparatively convenient to search for school size issues by state and to learn what other state legislatures are doing with respect to such issues as school size.[2] A simple search on "small schools" produced about eight resources in August 2000. Topics in which references appeared on that date included the following: hot topics, charter schools, state takeovers, school-based budgeting, public school choice, and promising practices. ECS's publication *The ABCs of Investing in Student Performance* (ERIC Document Reproduction Servie No. ED402 652) strongly endorses small school size.

ECS also maintains a number of committees, including its Policies and Priorities Committee, which "assesses ECS commissioners' priority concerns, recommends staff priorities for activities on education issues and assists in development of policy statements on education issues." This committee would be the logical body to consider development of a small schools initiative. Consult the ECS Web site for this committee's current list of members.

Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO)

One Massachusetts Ave. NW, Ste. 700
Washington, DC 20001-1431
voice 202-408-5505; fax 202-408-8072
e-mail info@ccsso.org; Web: http://www.ccsso.org/index.html

The CCSSO Web site features easily invoked links to all state departments of education and to all state legislatures. This feature makes the Web site quite useful in surveying the design and implementation of state-level policy initiatives. The following information about the CCSSO is featured on its Web site home page: "The Council of Chief State

School Officers is a nationwide, nonprofit organization composed of public officials who lead the departments responsible for elementary and secondary education in the states, the U.S. extra-state jurisdictions, the District of Columbia, and the Department of Defense Education Activity. In representing the chief education officers, CCSSO works on behalf of the state agencies that serve pre K-12 students throughout the nation." An important concern of the Council is articulation of state and federal reform efforts.

So far as can be inferred from information on its Web page, the CCSSO has not yet given much attention to school size issues, let alone policy related to promoting and sustaining small schools. The council does, however, engage about 30 specialized projects, including the Project to Improve Achievement in High Poverty Schools. According to the council's Web site, "The overarching goal of the project is to strengthen state leadership in ensuring that students in high-poverty schools gain the knowledge and skills necessary for sustained success through effective implementation of Title I and other federal and state programs."

National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE)

277 S. Washington St., Ste. 100, Alexandria, VA 22314
voice 703-684-4000; fax 703-836-2313
e-mail boards@nasbe.org; Web: http://www.nasbe.org/

From the NASBE Web page: "The National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) is a non-profit, private association with 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status that represents state and territorial boards of education. Our principal objectives include strengthening state leadership in educational policymaking; promoting excellence in the education of all students; advocating equality of access to educational opportunity; and assuring continued citizen support for public education."

The main constituency includes about 600 people directly related to the operation of state boards of education. As NASBE notes, "These members are responsible for the educational interests of more than fifty million students in public schools and more than three million students in post-secondary institutions."

The following is one of NASBE's numerous standing resolutions for 1999 (http://www.nasbe.org/resolutions.html), which should inter-

est readers of this book: "Small schools and schools in rural areas commonly face special problems associated with distance, sparse population, poverty, and staffing. State boards must ensure programs which effectively meet the needs of children in such schools. Educational technology and shared services should be utilized to alleviate the unique problems of these schools."

This resolution is particularly worthy of note since, in some regions, state education agencies and state boards of education often implement policies that make it difficult to operate small schools and districts. This threat, as noted in the substantive chapters, varies substantially from region to region and state to state.

National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) Denver Office
1560 Broadway, Ste. 700, Denver, CO 80202
voice 303-830-2200; fax 303-863-8003

Washington Office
444 N. Capitol St. NW, Ste. 515, Washington, DC 20001
voice 202-624-5400; fax 202-737-1069
e-mail info@NCSL.org
Web: http://www.ncsl.org/programs/educ/edu.htm

From the NCSL Web page: "NCSL is the premiere legislative organization. It is here to serve the men and women who serve the 50 states. . . . Our mission: improving the quality and effectiveness of state legislatures; fostering interstate communication and cooperation; [and] ensuring legislatures a strong, cohesive voice in the federal system." State legislatures have enormous influence over the conduct of schooling because governance of schooling is a reserved right of states under the U.S. Constitution. In the age of accountability and systemic reform, the influence of state legislatures has grown stronger. NCSL is another organization that can help you track legislative developments related to education in the 50 states. Education is, of course, a prominent concern at NCSL; the section of its Web site devoted to education is located at the Web address shown above. As of this writing, school size is not listed among its K-12 issues of principal concern (see http://www.ncsl.org/programs/educ/k12link.htm). Class size and school safety, however, are prominently listed concerns.

Rural Policy Research Institute (RUPRI)

135 Mumford Hall, University of Missouri
Columbia, MO 65211-6200
voice 573-882-0316; fax 573-884-5310
e-mail office@rupri.org; Web: http://www.rupri.org

From the RUPRI Web site: RUPRI conducts "policy-relevant research and facilitates public dialogue to assist policymakers in understanding the rural impacts of public policies and programs. Many policies which are not explicitly 'rural policies' nevertheless have substantial implications for rural areas, and RUPRI is dedicated to understanding and articulating these implications." The RUPRI Web site, at this writing, includes a "Rural Policy Resources" section organized as follows: Rural by the Numbers (Quick facts and information about rural America, highlighting key issues); Policy Links (On-line policy resources for rural America); Rural Calendar (Upcoming events of interest to rural policymakers and citizens); and Rural Policy Context (What is rural? Definitions, data, and the importance of place for public policy). Within the "Policy Links" section, organizations are listed by the following categories: agriculture, data sources, rural development, rural education, rural finance, rural health care, rural housing, rural telecommunications, and rural welfare reform.

RUPRI sponsors the leading independent effort to develop rural-specific policy information for policymakers and rural leaders. Rural telecommunications—including issues relevant to school access to advanced telecommunications services—is an ongoing interest. Much of RUPRI's work focuses on issues relevant to rural communities, not school issues. In addition to telecommunications, major RUPRI efforts address rural health care, rural equity capital access, and rural welfare reform.

Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE)

Graduate School of Education, University of Pennsylvania
3440 Market St., Ste. 560, Philadelphia, PA 19104-3325
voice 215-573-0700; fax 215-573-7914
e-mail cpre@gse.upenn.edu; Web: http://www.upenn.edu/gse/cpre/

From the CPRE mission statement: "Created in 1985, the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) unites researchers from

five of the nation's leading universities to improve elementary and secondary education through research on policy, finance, school reform, and school governance. Believing that reform, in order to be effective, must lead to high-quality instruction and improved student learning, CPRE researchers focus on three essential components. Effective reform must: incorporate a coherent set of policies and practices; contain meaningful incentives to individuals and the organization; and build the capacity of the individual and the organization to institute and sustain necessary changes." To contact CPRE staff members, consult the Web site.

Education Policy Analysis Archives (EPAA)

College of Education, Arizona State University
Tempe, AZ 85287-0211
voice 602-965-9644
e-mail glass@asu.edu; Web: http://www.olam.ed.asu.edu/epaa/

EPAA is perhaps the premier on-line professional journal in education, featuring peer-reviewed articles about education policy. Access and subscriptions are free. The EPAA Web site offers both abstracts and full-length versions of all articles. The editor is Gene V Glass, associate dean of the College of Education, Arizona State University. The target audience is educational policymakers and academics. EPAA is in its eighth year of publication and now offers more than 150 articles. Many reference school size.

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)

1990 K Street, NW, Washington, DC 20006
voice 202-502-7300
e-mail NCESWebMaster@ed.gov; Web: http://nces.ed.gov/

From the NCES Web page: "NCES is the primary federal entity for collecting and analyzing data that are related to education in the United States and other nations." The NCES Web site features links to a wide variety of information related to policy and educational decision making. Included are access to ERIC Digests, interactive data sets, a "school and district locator" (providing information about every public school or district in the United States), the "Encyclopedia of ED Stats" (with which you can search the major publications that provide a statistical picture of U.S. education), and much more.

Although NCES is a resource for people concerned with policy, it does not feature policy analysis, track legislation, or promote policy options. Instead, it is one of the most authoritative sources of statistical information describing schooling in the country. Information covers all levels of education (elementary, secondary, postsecondary), private as well as public sectors, and includes breakdowns by state, demographic characteristics, locale, and even size of schools or districts.

Community Engagement

Prominent organizations that have a primary interest in the mutual engagement of schools and communities are not very numerous. Those particularly interested in rural schools and communities are practically nonexistent. We have included the following organizations in this section:

- Rural School and Community Trust Place-Based Partners
- PACERS (Program for Rural Services and Research)
- Aspen Institute's Community Strategies Group
- Regional Centers for Rural Development
- Heartland Center for Leadership Development
- Charles Stewart Mott Foundation
- Community Development Society
- Participatory Action Research Network
- The President's Council on Sustainable Development

Rural School and Community Trust Place-Based Partners (Rural Trust)

e-mail info@ruraledu.org;

Web: http://www.ruralchallengepolicy.org/places.html

From the Rural Trust Partner Web page: "The Rural Trust is about places—the more than 700 schools in 33 states that are the heart of place-based education, and that are the soul of the rural education reform movement that is gaining momentum across the country. This section of the Web site will introduce you to the places where the Rural Trust and its partner organizations are working, and to the philosophies that guide their work. It will also allow you to contact individual places

to learn more about their projects, which have been funded by the Rural Trust's predecessor organization, the Annenberg Rural Challenge." For additional information about the Rural Trust, see the Policy section of this chapter.

Program for Rural Services and Research (PACERS)

The University of Alabama
205 University Blvd. East, Box 870372
Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0372
voice 205-348-6432; fax 205-348-2412
e-mail jchalmers@pacers.org;
Web http://www.pacers.org/

PACERS works with 29 small rural public schools throughout Alabama. From the PACERS Web site: "Through a variety of innovative projects, PACERS schools seek to improve and change the nature of learning. Inherent in this program is a process of reflection and sharing between teachers, students, administrators, and community members that leads to genuine school reform. Projects involve hands-on, interdisciplinary exercises that build on indigenous skills and resources. The school is recognized as the most important institution in rural communities. The future of rural communities is intertwined with the success of their schools."

At this writing, the PACERS Web site details about 15 community-based projects that include the following, among others: aquaculture, drama, greenhouses, house construction, celebrations of community and place, and rural skills. The Web site also includes links to other programs and resources, staff and partner contacts, and contact information for all the schools served by PACERS (many with e-mail addresses).

Aspen Institute's Community Strategies Group (CSG)

One Dupont Circle NW, Ste. 700, Washington, DC 20036
voice 202-736-5800; fax 202-293-0525
e-mail diane.morton@aspeninst.org;
Web: http://www.aspeninst.org/csg/default.asp

From the CSG Web page: "Formerly the Rural Economic Policy Program, which was established in 1985, the Community Strategies Group (CSG) helps organize peer exchange and critical examination

opportunities for rural practitioners who undertake groundbreaking initiatives or who face decision making junctures in policy and program review. CSG works to identify and involve key policymakers, technical experts and researchers in these efforts."

Though this is a policy program, we include it in this section because the links to K-12 schooling are minimal. This site does include discussion of community colleges, however, as well as many useful resources for community (not just "economic") development. You can also subscribe on-line (http://www.aspeninst.org/rural/updates/ruindex.html) to an electronic "Rural Update" newsletter. The site also provides a "Rural Development Resources Listing" (http://www.aspeninst.org/rural/updates/ruspecial.html) that includes annotations and brief discussions of resources organized into the following categories: foundations for success, overviews of rural development strategies, and selected rural development strategies (further analyzed into seven topical groupings).

Regional Centers for Rural Development (USDA)

From the Web site of the North Central Regional Center for Rural Development (one of 4 such centers): "The mission of the NCRCRD is to initiate and facilitate rural development research and education programs to improve the social and economic well-being of rural people in the region. The NCRCRD also provides leadership in rural development regionally and nationally by identifying, developing, and supporting programs on the vanguard of emerging issues."

The NCRCRD Web site features a publication, *Measuring Community Success and Sustainability*, that community organizers and leaders might find useful in efforts to build stronger relationships between small rural high schools and their communities. Point your Web browser to http://www.ag.iastate.edu/centers/rdev/Community_Success/about.html for the full text of this document.

The three other regional centers for rural development are

- **southern** (http://www.ext.msstate.edu/srdc/)
- **western** (http://www.ext.usu.edu/wrdc/)
- **northeastern** (http://www.cas.psu.edu/docs/casconf/nercrd/NERCRD.HTML)

The Heartland Center for Leadership Development (Heartland)

941 O St., Ste. 920, Lincoln, NE 68508
voice (toll-free) 800-927-1115; voice (local) 402-474-7667;
fax 402-474-7672
e-mail mw4137@aol.com;
Web: http://www.4w.com/heartland/index.html

From Heartland's home page: "The Heartland Center for Leadership Development is an independent, nonprofit organization developing local leadership that responds to the challenges of the future. A major focus of the Heartland Center's activities is practical resources and public policies for rural community survival . . . Heartland Center programs and publications stress the critical role played by local leadership as communities and organizations face the challenges associated with changing times. Programs of the Center emphasize that local capacity is critical—and renewing local leadership essential—as towns, cities and states work to remain competitive today and in the future."

Charles Stewart Mott Foundation (Mott)

200 Mott Foundation Bldg., Flint, MI 48502-1851
voice 810-238-5651; fax 810-766-1753
e-mail infocenter@mott.org;
Web: http://www.mott.org/

From the Mott Web site: "In the final analysis, the mission of the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation is: to support efforts that promote a just, equitable, and sustainable society."

Mott operates several programs, Community Schools, Civil Society, and Poverty, which are relevant to the issues raised by the case studies. Many publications are available at the Mott Web site, including the full text of *Learning Together: A Look at 20 School-Community Initiatives.* The initiatives described and analyzed in this book are mostly urban or statewide initiatives, but findings may provide some insights to rural leaders.

According to the Web site, the goal of the Mott education initiative is "to improve the effectiveness of public education in low-income communities by improving teaching and by reconnecting parents, residents, and communities with schools, creating systemic change to increase student achievement."

Community Development Society (CDS)

1123 N. Water St., Milwaukee, WI 53202

voice 414-276-7106; fax 414-276-7704

e-mail cole@svinicki.com; Web: http://comm-dev.org/index.html

From the CDS Web site: "The International Community Development Society (CDS), founded in 1969, is a professional association for community development practitioners and citizen leaders around the world. CDS members represent a variety of fields: education, health care, social services, government, utilities, economic development practitioners, citizen groups, and more."

The CDS, which has international membership, offers a number of resources on-line, though some are for members only (regular membership is $55, and organizational membership is $200 per year). At this writing, the site features what may be the largest collection of links (http://comm-dev.org/sites.htm) to community development resources on the Web. The site gives some attention to rural and urban issues.

Participatory Action Research Network (PARnet)

e-mail kaa20@cornell.edu; Web: http://PARnet.org/home.cfm

From the PARnet Web site: "The Cornell PAR Network (CPARN) is a group of students, faculty, and local practitioners who share a commitment to promoting high standards of intellectual and social integrity in doing social research for social change."

This site features about 90 electronic full-text documents related to "participatory action research." Participatory action research is locally-based and popularly organized research that investigates local conditions in order to change them. It is one possible tool for community development.

President's Council on Sustainable Development (PCSD)

Web: http://www.whitehouse.gov/PCSD/

The PCSD completed its work in June of 1999, but its Web site remains active as of this writing. The Web site contains full-length publications that describe literally hundreds of projects from every state in the nation, including numerous rural projects.

From the Web site: "The mission of the PCSD was to: forge consensus on policy by bringing together diverse interests to identify

and develop innovative economic, environmental and social policies and strategies; demonstrate implementation of policy that fosters sustainable development by working with diverse interests to identify and demonstrate implementation of sustainable development; get the word out about sustainable development; and evaluate and report on progress by recommending national, community, and enterprise level frameworks for tracking sustainable development."

This Web site probably has limited prospects for continued existence. However, relevant reports of the PCSD will nonetheless be available in libraries and archives. Among the reports, these are perhaps the most relevant to themes raised in the case studies:

Sustainable Communities Task Force Report (Fall 1997)

The Road to Sustainable Development: A Snapshot of Activities in the United States of America (March 1997)

Public Linkage, Dialogue, and Education (February 1997)

Sustainable Agriculture (1996)

Towards a Sustainable America: Advancing Prosperity, Opportunity, and a Healthy Environment for the 21st Century (Final Report to the President, May 1999)

Sustainable America: A New Consensus for Prosperity, Opportunity, and A Healthy Environment for the Future (February 1996)

Building on Consensus: A Progress Report on Sustainable America (January 1997)

The PCSD Web site notes that reports are available by calling 800-363-3732. They can also be obtained from the U.S. Government Printing Office by calling 202-512-1800.

School Facilities for Rural Communities

The issue of rural school facility construction is very rarely distinguished from the generic issues of school facility construction. We have selected three organizations to list in this section. They are

- AEL, Inc.
- Organizations Concerned about Rural Education (OCRE)
- The National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities

The National Clearinghouse does not currently exhibit a particular interest in rural school facilities. However, it supports an almost unique link to school facilities issues and organizations nationwide, and is therefore a convenient resource even for people concerned about sustaining small rural high schools.

For an original—even groundbreaking—view of rural school facilities see the recent article by Ray Barnhardt and Patrick Dubbs, "The Log School: A Case for Appropriate Design," from the Center for Cross-Cultural Studies at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks (available on-line at this writing: http://www.ruraledu.org/logschool.html).

AEL, Inc.

P.O. Box 1348, Charleston, WV 25325-1348
voice (toll-free) 800-624-9120; voice (local) 304-347-0400;
fax 304-347-0487
e-mail childerr@ael.org;
Web: http://www.ael.org/rel/rural/index.htm

Very few specific resources exist to help those planning school facilities in *rural communities.* AEL offers two such resources. The first is a publication that focuses the particular needs of rural schools and it includes a checklist to help guide planning efforts. It can be accessed from the Web at http://www.ael.org/rel/rural/Papers/planning.htm. The second is an edited volume featuring updated and expanded papers originally presented in 1998 at the *Invitational Conference on Rural School Facilities.* This event was jointly sponsored by the National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities, AEL, and the ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools.

Organizations Concerned about Rural Education (OCRE)

1201 16th St., Ste. 510, Washington, DC 20036
voice 202-822-7638; fax 202-822-7309
e-mail conrad@chesapeake.net; Web: http://www.ruralschools.org

From the OCRE Web site: "The most broad-based coalition ever organized around a single rural issue: improving rural education. Organizations Concerned about Rural Education is a coalition of more than two dozen education, farm, rural, technology, and utility organizations. What brings us together is our common concern for the eco-

nomic future of rural America, particularly, the education of rural children. Modern, effective schools are vitally important to that future."

OCRE is listed here and not elsewhere because improving rural school facilities was a major focus of the organization at this writing. OCRE is actively involved in promoting electronic connectivity, as well. The OCRE site also features a number of resources and connections for citizens and local groups interested in advocating the needs of rural schools and communities.

National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities (NCEF)

1090 Vermont Ave. NW, Ste. 700, Washington, DC 20005-4905
voice (toll-free) 888-552-0624; voice (local) 202-289-7800;
fax 202-289-1092
e-mail cwagner@nibs.org (communications manager);
Web: http://www.edfacilities.org/

From the NCEF Web site: "Created in 1997, the National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities (NCEF) is an information resource for people who plan, design, build, operate, and maintain K-12 schools." The NCEF is an affiliate clearinghouse of the ERIC system.

This site is an accessible resource for community and district leaders and others concerned with decisions about rural school construction and maintenance. At this writing the "hot topics" section includes a large collection of resources (many with full text) organized in the following categories: planning, design, financing, construction, and operations and maintenance.

Among the topics listed under planning, the site provides 50 resources on "community involvement," 31 related to school size, and 73 related to the condition of the nation's schools. Altogether, the site provides links to 39 other topics in addition to those already mentioned. The NCEF Web site also includes an assortment of professional organizations with a technical or policy interest in school facilities, including state-level school facility planning units or associations.

School and Curricular Leadership

The focus of this section is on organizations that devote a large portion of their resources to people who work in, teach at, or lead small or rural schools. Most of these organizations also work on policy and

community issues. The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) considers an especially wide range of issues, but its *central efforts*, like those of the other organizations listed in this section, concern improvement in the day-to-day operation of actual schools (that is, as distinguished from the development or improvement of educational policy). The highlighted organizations comprise the following list:

- National Association of Secondary School Principals
- ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools
- Small Schools Workshop
- National Rural Education Association
- American Council on Rural Special Education
- Regional Educational Laboratory Network
- Small Schools Network (Canada)
- Saskatchewan (Canada) School Trustees Association

National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP)

1904 Association Dr., Reston, VA 20191-1537
voice 703-860-0200; fax 703-476-5432
e-mail rahme@nassp.org; Web: http://www.nassp.org/jobs/index.html

From the NASSP Web site: "NASSP reaffirms its historical and continuing commitment to and support for principals, assistant principals, and other school leaders. Recognizing that technological, social, and political changes in the world are affecting how we educate youth, NASSP provides the professional resources for these leaders to be visionary change agents, collaborators within the school community, and risk takers. NASSP is the preeminent organization for middle level and high school leaders, representing a diverse membership. NASSP will be at the forefront in establishing standards for exemplary schools and leaders by fostering a greater understanding of the global marketplace, the impact of technology, and the effects of the information age on teaching and learning."

NASSP maintains a "Smaller Secondary Schools Committee" composed of eight members from around the nation. The secretary of the

committee is NASSP associate executive director and director of High School Services John A. Lammel (LammelJ@nassp.org). Contact information for all committee members appears on the NASSP Web site. Together with the Carnegie Foundation, NASSP developed a national report, "Breaking Ranks," which included a recommendation that high schools be kept small (see the "short reading list" that concludes this chapter for more information about this report).

ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools (ERIC/CRESS)

AEL, Inc.
P.O. Box 1348, Charleston, WV 25325-1348
voice 800-624-9120; TDD 304-347-0448; fax 304-347-0467
e-mail ericrc@ael.org; Web: http://www.ael.org/eric/

ERIC/CRESS contributes information about rural education, small schools, outdoor education, and the education of American Indians, Alaska Natives, Mexican Americans, and migrants to a large national database of educational resources (the familiar ERIC database). It also publishes research summaries and books about these areas of interest. Among the available books, *Sustainable Small Schools* ought to be seen as the companion volume to this book.

On-line searching of the ERIC database is accessible through the clearinghouse at the following Web address: http://www.ael.org/eric/search.htm. The ERIC "Search Wizard" (http://ericae.net/scripts/ewiz/amain2.asp) is an excellent site that helps you use educational concepts when you interact with the database. The Search Wizard guides you to use the most specific and productive search words.

Small Schools Workshop (SSW)

University of Illinois at Chicago, College of Education
115 S. Sangamon St., Rm. 118, Chicago, IL 60607
voice 312-413-8066; fax 312-413-5847
e-mail ssw@uic.edu;
Web: http://www.uic.edu/depts/educ/ssw/homeroom.html

From the SSW Web site: "The Small Schools Workshop collaborates with teachers, principals, and parents to create new, small, innova-

tive learning communities in public schools. In addition to our interest in individual schools, the Small Schools Workshop actively explores the larger issues of education reform, with a particular focus on the role that small schools can have in furthering positive whole-school and systemic change. . . . The Small Schools Workshop provides assistance to public schools in the process of restructuring and participates in many initiatives to broaden and deepen recognition of the importance of school size to student learning, especially among educators and policymakers."

SSW is an urban-oriented program, with its practical work focused on Chicago. However, as indicated in the preceding statement, the SSW leadership develops connections with people seeking to support small schools elsewhere. Rural people have much to learn from, as well as teach, urban advocates of small schools.

At this writing, the SSW "Info Center" features numerous materials on school size, small schools, and "downsizing" (houses, schools within schools, etc., from the Clearinghouse on Urban Education), as well as a Chicago small schools directory (listing more than 125 schools), articles from major newspapers around the nation, a bookshelf, a "voices of reform" section, and an extensive list of small school Web links.

National Rural Education Association (NREA)

Colorado State University
230 Education Building
Fort Collins, CO 80523
voice 970-491-7022; fax 970-491-1317
e-mail jnewlin@lamar.colostate.edu;
Web: http://www.colostate.edu/Orgs/NREA/

This vision statement is from the NREA Web site: "NREA will be the leading national organization providing services which enhance educational opportunities for rural schools and their communities."

NREA is an omnibus professional and advocacy organization. It sponsors a professional journal, *The Rural Educator*, and a quarterly newsletter, *The NREA News*, as well as an annual conference. NREA maintains relationships with a wide range of organizations interested in rural education and has numerous affiliates at the state level.

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American Council on Rural Special Education (ACRES)

Kansas State University
2323 Anderson Ave., Ste. 226, Manhattan, KS 66502-2912
voice 785-53-ACRES (532-2737); fax 785-532-7732
e-mail acres@ksu.edu; Web: http://www.k-state.edu/acres/

From the ACRES Web site: "ACRES is the only national organization devoted entirely to special education issues that affect rural America. The membership of ACRES is geographically diverse, and is representative of all regions of the country. This fact is especially important since rural issues are not only different from urban issues, but also may vary among specific rural areas."

ACRES does not maintain a special focus on small schools, but its membership is sensitive to issues of school size and the challenges of delivering specialized services in small rural schools.

Regional Educational Laboratory Network (Lab Network)

Web: http://www.relnetwork.org/

From the Lab Network Web site: "The network of 10 Regional Educational Laboratories, serving geographic regions that span the nation, works to ensure that those involved in educational improvement at the local, state, and regional levels have access to the best available information from research and practice. . . . The laboratories conduct research which results in models for implementing systemic reform and for achieving improvement on a broad scale; provide information, training, and technical assistance to help states, schools, and communities to implement comprehensive school improvement strategies; promote widespread access to information regarding research and best practice; create communities of learners who collaborate with each laboratory to develop and disseminate informative materials; cooperate with other agencies and programs to provide support services to educators and policymakers working to improve education; and forge strong links to the research community to encourage further findings to improve education. In addition, each laboratory has a specific area of expertise assigned by Office of Educational Research and Improvement, and makes that expertise widely and readily available to all schools and communities throughout the nation."

A map of the regions covered by the 10 laboratories, together with postal addresses, phone numbers, email addresses, and Web sites appears on the Lab Network Web site at the following address: http://www.relnetwork.org/contact.html.

Small Schools Network (SSN)

Educational Administration Unit, Theory and Policy Studies in Education, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/UT
252 Bloor St. West, Toronto, Ontario M5S 1V6
voice 416-923-6641, ext. 2757; fax: 416-926-4741
e-mail jdavis@oise.utoronto.ca (John Davis)

This nationwide Canadian group issues a periodic newsletter and sponsors an annual conference. The group does not as yet sponsor a Web site.

Saskatchewan School Trustees Association (SSTA)

400 - 2222 13th Ave., Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada S4P 3M7
voice 306-569-750; fax 306-352-9633
e-mail ssta@ssta.sk.ca; Web: http://www.ssta.sasknet.com/

From the SSTA Web site: "The Saskatchewan School Trustees Association, as a democratic and voluntary organization, ensures advocacy, leadership and support for member boards of education by speaking as the voice for quality public education for all children, offering opportunities for trustee development, and providing information and services."

This organization is one of the few that focuses specifically on the needs of small rural schools. Small schools is one of 18 key educational issues listed by the SSTA. To learn more, visit the SSTA Web site at http://www.ssta.sk.ca/research/small_schools/small_schools.htm.

A Short Reading List of Nine Practical Books and Thirty ERIC Digests Useful for Efforts to Sustain Small High Schools

The Nine Books

The editors selected these books to emphasize ways to put the "big picture" of rural education together with the details of school improve-

ment and community development. Most were referenced in the preceding chapters, and all treat themes related to education policy and purpose, curriculum and school leadership, democratic community development, and small size or scale. The abstracts presented here were drawn from the ERIC database.

The works, listed in rough order of practicality, are all relevant to the job of leading small rural schools.

Books at the beginning of the list. Howley and Eckman, Gregory and Smith, Kleinfeld, and Schmuck and Schmuck have a big picture in view, but emphasize work in rural schools and classrooms.

Books in the middle of the list. NASSP and Meier focus on practical matters of schooling, but from a more generic or urban perspective.

Books near the end of the list. Theobald, Orr, and Haas and Nachtigal are excellent resources for developing an understanding of the big picture in rural education, but place less emphasis on the details of work in rural schools and classrooms.

Be sure to consult *Place Value* by Haas and Nachtigal for further reading suggestions. It is the last and perhaps most important of the nine books listed, because it conveys a rich and substantial understanding of the rural circumstance.

Sustainable Small Schools: A Handbook for Rural Communities
Edited by C. Howley and J. Eckman (1997). Charleston, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools (164 pp, $15; ISBN 1-880785-16-1).

This book aims to help parents, community members, and educators find resources, design school options, and take action together to improve small rural schools in ways that meet community and student needs. Chapter 1 discusses the virtues of smallness, outlines basic assumptions about the role and nature of good education, examines the school-community relationship and the need to reestablish parent and community involvement, and underscores the ability of citizens to be educational change agents. Chapter 2 discusses the aims and history of mass schooling in industrial society; social and political forces driving school consolidation; ways to address the "hard" issues of consolidation (course offerings, costs, achievement); and aspects of state policymaking. This chapter also lists 29 key studies and literature reviews about school

size. Chapter 3 provides examples of strategies to make the rural community the focus of curricula, including community study, the Foxfire approach, and school involvement in local economic development. Chapter 4 describes innovative tactics for organizing rural schools, including the four-day week, mixed-age (or multigrade) classrooms, and use of electronic technology. Chapter 5 provides strategic and tactical tips for making change happen. Chapter 6 is an annotated bibliography and resource list in eight sections: partnerships between schools and parents/families, or communities; coalition building; needs assessment; research on consolidation and school size; innovations featured in the book; rural resources from regional educational laboratories; and tools for finding information. Includes an index.

High Schools as Communities: The Small School Reconsidered
By T. Gregory and G. Smith (1987). Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappa (158 pp., out of print, but still available from EDRS, ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 278 518).

Urging new directions for American high school education, this book outlines problems with contemporary high schools. It describes the experience of small high schools (those having approximately 200 students), designed in the past 15 years, that have developed excellent and diverse alternative programs within the constraints of existing district policies and funding formulas. Chapter 1 reviews educational criticism since the 1950s. Chapter 2 contrasts two high schools—one traditional, one nontraditional—in one community, focusing on the influence of school size and school culture. Chapter 3 outlines the benefits of small high schools for students and teachers. Chapter 4 discusses strategies for change at the technical, managerial, and cultural levels, noting that change at the cultural level is the most difficult to achieve and has the greatest effect. Chapter 6 describes "Mountain Open" High School, a model small high school program in Colorado. Topics include educational philosophy, individualized learning, student characteristics, teaching conditions, and curriculum. Discussion of curriculum covers the use of trips, community learning, community service, and the Walkabout—a culminating project in which students prove they can use their skills in real-world settings. Chapter 7 presents change strategies, emphasizing the need to address the problems of school size, structure, and culture.

Inventive Teaching: The Heart of the Small School

By J. Kleinfeld (1992). Fairbanks, AK: Center for Cross-Cultural Studies, University of Alaska, Fairbanks (242 pp; price approximately $15, ISBN 1-877962-22-8).

This book highlights programs and ideas that take advantage of small classrooms and of other resources in the local environment. The programs demonstrate the inventiveness and imagination of teachers in small schools. The following chapters are contained in the book: (1) "Draw From All the Resources in Your School," which includes information on such topics as tutorials, departmentalization, peer tutoring, educational technology, and scheduling; (2) "Explore the Education Available in the Community," which advocates using local talent, developing cultural heritage projects, providing community services, and starting student enterprises; (3) "Broaden Students' Experience with Travel Programs," which explains how to organize study trips; (4) "Academic Enrichment Programs," which describes creative programs in the arts, language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies; (5) "Interdisciplinary Programs," which highlights such programs as the National Diffusion Network and the Knowledge Master Open; (6) "Correspondence Study Programs," which provides information and contacts for correspondence programs; (7) "Practical Skills Programs," which describes programs that involve work experience, student organizations, community programs, urban survival skills, student exchange, and outdoor skills; (8) "Summer Programs," which highlights programs in health careers, college preparation, and fine arts; and (9) "Social Programs," which provides resources and contacts in the areas of substance abuse, suicide, and child abuse and neglect. The final section of the book contains sources of information relevant to small schools, including lists of clearinghouses and other organizations, publishers of journals and studies, and global education resources. This book contains photographs and illustrations.

Small Districts, Big Problems: Making School Everybody's House

By R. Schmuck and P. Schmuck (1992). Newbury Park, CA: Corwin Press (199 pp., $18.95; ISBN 0-8039-9026-3).

This book chronicles a six-month odyssey over America's back roads, by the authors who visited 80 schools in 25 small school districts

in 21 states, in hopes of finding effective schools where smallness facilitated participation by all. District size ranged from 450 to 2,000 students. Data collection included observation of classes and meetings; group interviews of classes; and individual interviews with superintendents, principals, board of education members, teachers, students, and other community members. Though often struggling, each school was still at the center of life in its community, engaging virtually everyone as it provided education, entertainment, social life, and community identity. Most of the towns visited were in deep economic trouble, and most school districts were struggling with a tight budget and an increasingly needy student population. Although economic circumstances were dire, the biggest problems found in small districts were social and emotional. Instead of finding schools where small class size promoted faculty cooperation and student involvement, researchers found schools that were often regimented, authoritarian, and filled with bored students and overworked, frustrated teachers. There were few signs of teacher collaboration, "whole-person" interpersonal relationships, democratic participation by teachers or students, or cooperative learning in the classroom. Chapters give detailed findings on students, teachers, principals, superintendents, and school board members. The final chapter presents a school "blueprint" that focuses on transactional communication, polyarchic influence, and respect for the individual, and outlines the effort needed for improvements from each group of stakeholders. Contains an index.

The Power of Their Ideas: Lessons for America from a Small School in Harlem

By D. Meier (1995). Boston: Beacon Press (204 pp., $13; ISBN 0807031-11-9).

At Central Park East (CPE) schools in East Harlem, New York City, 90 percent of students graduate from high school and 90 percent of those go on to college. Starting with the CPE success story, this book shows why good education is possible for all children, and why public education is vital to the future of our democracy. Begun in the mid-1970s, CPE is now four public schools serving primarily Latino and African American students, most from low-income families. Rooted in the traditions of progressive education, CPE has focused on: (1) building democratic community by giving decision-making power to school

staff and preparing students for full citizenship; (2) promoting strong, respectful relationships with families and the local community; (3) fostering "habits of the mind," or rigorous critical inquiry that challenges students' curiosity and builds on their natural drive toward competence; (4) integrating the curriculum and teaching fewer subjects in depth rather than more subjects superficially; and (5) connecting learning to the real world. The innovations undertaken at CPE were made possible by school choice mechanisms (parents chose to send their children to CPE) and by the schools' small size. Small size (defined as a maximum of 20 teachers, with a maximum class size of 20) allows staff to be personally involved in all school decisions, to know about each other's work, and to know their students' work and ways of thinking. It also fosters physical safety and accountability and immerses students in a school culture shaped by adults. By engaging teachers, small schools stand a chance of engaging students, too, and helping them become lifelong learners and active participants of a free society. Contains lists of suggested readings.

Breaking Ranks: Changing an American Institution

By National Association of Secondary School Principals and the Carnegie Foundation (1996). Reston, VA: NASSP (127 pp., out of print, but still available on ERIC microfiche, ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 393 205).

This handbook is the result of more than 2 years of deliberations by the Commission on the restructuring of the American High School. The commission emerged from a partnership of the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. The report focuses on revitalizing education for all students and points to what is needed for the twenty-first century high school. Eighty recommendations are offered in three sections: priorities for renewal; Web of support; and leadership. They encompass the scope of programs and activities affecting high school students, including socialization, basic skills, electronic learning, assessment and accountability, links to higher education, school leadership, the classroom, and business-school partnerships. The report represents the commissioners' recommendations to ensure that every student receives a complete, student-centered, and high quality education. Contains 123 endnotes.

Teaching the Commons: Place, Pride, and the Renewal of Community By P. Theobald (1997). Boulder, CO: Westview Press (189 pp.; $22; ISBN 0-813323-02-9).

This book addresses the role that rural schools can play in promoting community and developing a community-oriented world view. Specifically, this book suggests that rural schools, through concerted pedagogical and curricular attention to the dynamics of their particular place, can rekindle community allegiance and nurture a sense of fulfillment in meeting community obligations. Part 1, "The Creation of Community from a Historical Perspective," examines the ideas upon which community was built in the past. The chapters in this section propose that intradependence, cyclic time, and the avoidance of risk (three agrarian communal characteristics) were once vital parts of the health and well-being of communities. They assert that these characteristics, though in severe decline, still linger in rural portions of the United States, and that their decline has coincided with the rise of an industrial world view. This view encompasses notions about the self, the economy, the proper role of government, and the role of education as training for successful competition in a global economy. Part 2, "Public Policy and the Subordination of Community," chronicles historical developments that undermine community elements and bolster cultural infatuation with the individual. In this section of the book, rural history and the decline of rural communities represents an American tragedy perpetrated by urban commercialist interests under the guise of "progress." Part 3, "Education and the Renewal of Community," addresses the simultaneous renewal of rural schools and communities based on rebuilding those communities on an educational rather than an economic foundation. The chapters in this section provide examples of how this renewal process can be initiated in both the community and schools. Contains references in chapter notes and an index.

Earth in Mind: On Education, Environment, and the Human Prospect By D. Orr (1994). Washington, DC: Island Press (223 pp., $18.95; ISBN 1-559632-95-X).

This book includes 23 essays on the environmental crisis that address the failure to educate people to think broadly, to perceive systems and patterns, and to live as whole persons. Current educational

reforms are driven by the belief that students must be prepared to effectively compete in a global economy. A more important reason to reform education is the rapid decline in the habitability of the earth. This book proposes that the disordering of ecological systems and the great biogeochemical cycles of the earth reflect a prior disorder in the thought, perception, imagination, intellectual priorities, and loyalties inherent in the industrial mind. Ultimately, then, current ecological crises relate to how individuals think and to how educational institutions shape and refine individuals' capacity to think. Education should be promoting the development of ecological design intelligence, the signs of which are healthy, durable, resilient, just, and prosperous communities. Part 1 addresses questions surrounding the purpose of education, the dangers of education, and the business of education. Part 2 suggests that society must rethink initial assumptions about learning and educational goals. As the curriculum has become more extensive, complex, and technologically sophisticated, society has lost the ability to ask questions about the human condition. Essays in this section focus on love, intelligence, wisdom, virtue, responsibility, value, and good sense. Part 3 proposes that standards for educational quality must change to account for how institutions and their graduates affect the biotic world. Chapters in this section address institutional standards, the disciplinary organization of learning, curriculum, professionalism, and implications of college architecture. Part 4 proposes an alternative destiny for education. These essays explore "biophilia," an innate affinity for life; obstacles to living well; and the future balance between rural and urban areas in a world that must come to grips with limits of many kinds. Contains references and an index.

Place Value: An Educator's Guide to Good Literature on Rural Lifeways, Environments, and Purposes of Education

By T. Haas and P. Nachtigal (1998). Charleston, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools (78 pp, $12; ISBN 1-880785-19-6).

This book suggests that quality of life depends on the connections that people have with one another and their surroundings, rather than on material wealth. It challenges teachers to reexamine the purposes of education and to equip students with the tools they need to make

conscious choices about living well in their own communities. Five bibliographical essays review nonfictional and fictional literature on what it means to live well in a particular place. "A Sense of Place: Education for Living Well Ecologically" looks at the importance of young people having a curiosity about their surroundings and becoming inhabitants of a place, not merely transient residents. By developing a healthy respect for the physical and social communities they inhabit, schools can teach children to be contributing citizens. "A Sense of Civic Involvement: Education for Living Well Politically" examines the preparation of young people to participate as citizens of a democracy by investigating and acting on municipal and county government issues. "A Sense of Worth: Education for Living Well Economically" looks at the influence of large corporations on the breakdown of rural life and suggests that students need to learn how to create jobs within their own community, rather than leave to get jobs somewhere else. "A Sense of Connection: Education for Living Well Spiritually" discusses the crisis of human identity and cosmological disconnection from the natural world. "A Sense of Belonging: Education for Living Well in Community" examines saving, restoring, and using local memories, knowledge, and skills to fulfill needs in the local community. An annotated bibliography of the 42 works cited in the essays contains commentary and an abstract for each work.

The 30 ERIC Digests

ERIC digests are developed as objective summaries of critical and current issues in educational practice, research, or policy. They are short (about 1,500 words), readable, and authoritative. Thousands of titles are available, and approximately 160 new titles are developed each year.

The 30 titles listed here treat many of the issues and themes represented in the case studies. We have tried to select those most pertinent to sustaining and improving small rural high schools and their communities, but hundreds more digests are available. You can retrieve the *full texts* of these works on-line at the following Web address: http://ericae.net/search.htm#Dig. You can also search for other titles or subjects at that Web address or by using any popular search engine.

Digests featured below are listed under each topic, from most recent to earliest publication date.

Effects of Small Size

ED 425 049 *Current Literature on Small Schools.* 1999. Author: Raywid, Mary Anne

ED 414 615 *School Size.* 1997. Author: Irmsher, Karen

ED 401 088 *Affective and Social Benefits of Small-Scale schooling.* 1996. Author: Cotton, Kathleen

ED 401 089 *Ongoing Dilemmas of School Size: A Short Story.* 1996. Author: Howley, Craig

ED 372 897 *The Academic Effectiveness of Small-Scale Schooling (An Update).* 1994. Author: Howley, Craig

Curriculum and School Leadership

ED 425 051 *Outdoor Education and the Development of Civic Responsibility.* 1999. Author: Boss, Judith A.

ED 416 042 *The National Information Infrastructure: Keeping Rural Values and Purposes in Mind.* 1997. Authors: Howley, Craig, and Bruce Barker

ED 406 846 *Vernacular Dialects in U.S. Schools.* 1997. Author: Christian, Donna

ED 406 718 *The Strategies of a Leader.* 1996. Author: Lashway, Larry

ED 401 090 *Curriculum Adequacy and Quality in High Schools Enrolling Fewer Than 400 Pupils (9-12).* 1996. Author: Roellke, Christopher

ED 384 951 *Priority on Learning: Efficient Use of Resources.* 1995. Author: Oswald, Lori Jo

ED 357 910 *Developing Supplemental Funding: Initiatives for Rural and Small Schools.* 1993. Author: Carlson, Robert

ED 308 057 *Touching the Past, En Route to the Future: Cultural Journalism in the Curriculum of Rural Schools.* 1989. Author: Olmstead, Kathryn

Community Development

ED 425 050 *Rural African Americans and Education: The Legacy of the Brown Decision.* 1999. Author: Kusimo, Patricia S.

ED 423 211 *Education for Engagement in Civil Society and Government.* 1998. Author: Patrick, John J.

ED 421 640 *Service Learning: More than Community Service.* 1998. Author: Brown, Bettina Lankard

ED 414 112 *Outdoor Education and Environmental Responsibility.* 1997. Authors: Yerkes, Rita, and Kathy Haras

ED 399 482 *New Federal Youth Initiatives in Canada.* 1995. Authors: Hanna, Sharron, and Lisa Dornan

ED 384 479 *The Role of Rural Schools in Rural Community Development.* 1995. Author: Miller, Bruce A.

ED 348 196 *Charting New Maps: Multicultural Education in Rural Schools.* 1992. Authors: Oliver, Jenny Penney, and Craig Howley

ED 345 931 *What Can I Become?: Educational Aspirations of Students in Rural America.* 1992. Author: Haas, Toni

Policy

ED 425 896 *Charter Schools: An Approach for Rural Education?* 1999. Author: Collins, Timothy

ED 422 600 *Charter Schools.* 1998. Author: Hadderman, Margaret

ED 357 434 *The Changing Role of School Boards.* 1993. Author: Todras, Ellen

ED 350 717 *Financial Equity in the Schools.* 1992. Author: Renchler, Ron

ED 345 930 *Rural Philosophy for Education: Wendell Berry's Tradition.* 1992. Author: Theobald, Paul

ED 335 205 *Funding Rural, Small Schools: Strategies at the State house.* 1991. Author: Verstegen, Deborah

ED 319 583 *Capital Outlay: A Critical Concern in Rural Education.* 1990. Hunter, James, and Craig Howley

ED 324 777 *Emerging Issues in State-Level School Finance.* 1990. McGuire, Kent

ED 291 164 *State vs. Local Control of Schools.* 1988. Author: Hadderman, Margaret L.

Notes

1. Additionally, the section of this chapter devoted to "School and Curricular Leadership" lists organizations that provide information relevant to policymaking, as well as to school leadership (for example, the ERIC clearinghouses and the Regional Educational Laboratory Network).
2. States commonly imitate one another's legislation. This habit does not necessarily work to benefit small schools. Legislation (e.g., educational accountability legislation) needs to be examined critically by rural school and community leaders. Legislative bandwagons are at least as harmful as school-improvement bandwagons.

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APPENDIX A

Schools as Centers of Community (excerpt[1])
Remarks of U.S. Secretary of Education
Richard Riley at
The American Institute of Architects
Washington, DC
October 13, 1999

. . . We Americans love bigness. We are a big country and we think in big terms and that's not usually bad. But big is not always better when it comes to the education of our children. Much of the research we have available to us now suggests that schools should be no bigger than 600 students. As one talented principal told me, a school is too big when I can't remember the names of all my students.

However, about 70 percent of all of our nation's students now go to schools with at least 1,000 students. Years ago, we consolidated schools on the assumption that we could provide a more comprehensive education for all of our children.

Many rural communities resisted consolidation for fear that in losing their school they were losing an elemental part of their community. Now, with new research in hand, I suggest we take a second look at what we are doing when it comes to building big schools.

I don't think we are helping our children very much when we ask them to get into the lunch line at 9:30 and 10:00 in the morning because the cafeteria is too small to handle all the students. If you have ever been to big high school when classes end—watch out. It is controlled chaos with principals and teachers acting as traffic cops.

Small schools, in contrast, allow young people to feel more connected, have higher attendance, smaller classes, less drug and alcohol abuse, and children who feel safer. In a small school more young people get involved in activities and parents are more involved as well. These are very important considerations.

I've talked to many honest and caring principals, who admit that they just lose students because their school is too big. They couldn't

reach the students before they became disconnected or dropped out. I think the big idea for the future is this—think small. . . .

Notes

1. The full text of Secretary Riley's speech is available online at the following Web address: http://www.ed.gov/Speeches/10-1999/991013.html

Appendix B

Updates from the Study Schools (March 2000)

Oneida High School

by

Superintendent L. Mayfield Brown

Oneida Special School District has continued to flourish during the past two years. The system has become a confident sustaining beacon of light for the region, the state, and the nation. The system is still experiencing good test scores, increased student success, and is still playing a little ball.

The class of 1999 had 90 percent of the students participating in the ACT with a composite average of 21, the national average. We had two National Commended Merit Scholars with the expectation of a National Merit Scholar in the class of 2001. The athletic teams are still setting high standards for the classes to follow by achieving winning records, regional titles, and attending state play-offs each year.

The success of the school system has now attracted people to the region who desire the rustic beauty and small-town, nurturing environment offered by the rural setting. The "Mayberry RFD" scenario has once again become desirable for rearing children. The success of the school system also has been credited with the arrival of new employment opportunities in the region, which has created a good problem: the need to expand the facilities. The Oneida Elementary school is presently adding six new classrooms. The arts program has also grown with the addition of a new state-of-the-art band room. The previous new band room could no longer house the increased members. It now houses the Jostens Learning Lab of 50 computers for the high school/middle school.

As a University of Tennessee professional development school system, Oneida Schools have been featured nationally via an infomercial during the 1999-2000 UT athletic events. The school's success has also

been featured by a team of administration and teachers who have traveled to various state, regional, and national conferences with presentations entitled "The Little School that Could." The emphasis of the presentation is that change is possible, sustainable, and realistic. As students pass through the system and become community members and parents, sustainability will come from new generations' expectations that their children should receive nothing less than what they had received as children.

Recently during the 1999 Advisory Council Meeting, twenty-two new goals were set for the Oneida Special School District. Goal number 14 dealt with the increase of teacher salaries. Oneida teachers were ranked in the lower third of the Tennessee pay scale. The staff has enjoyed a recent raise, which increased their rank to the top third of the state.

The isolation of rural communities has historically limited exposure and contact of its citizenry with the larger world. However, a new world has been opened for the Oneida students and teachers, through the use of the Internet. Networking available for the staff, students and administration has created a new resource for keeping everyone at the forefront of information available. We view setbacks as learning experiences and continue to move forward, one step at a time.

Wahluke High School
by
Superintendent William L. Miller

As this book goes to press, there are approximately 350 students in a high school that was never supposed to exist. Wahluke School District children who enter school speaking English average at the 67.8 percentile nationally. Students who transition from another language (Spanish) and have strong support in the home average at the 59.6 percentile.

The Wahluke High School Warriors have taken three first-place awards in state athletics this year. In 2A-level sports statewide, the Warriors won third place in football and wrestling. One senior girl placed third in the state junior miss competition and is a Washington Scholar. The girls softball team has gone to the state play-offs almost every year since the high school was created. The boys soccer team, which is composed almost entirely of Hispanics, went to the state play-offs the first year the team was formed.

In February 2000, state superintendent Dr. Terry Bergesen opened the state standards conference by addressing approximately 2,000 teachers, administrators, and school board members. At the conclusion of her presentation, she invited 75 Wahluke students to join her on stage. The students all had laptop computers and wore black T-shirts that had on the front "*Ssshhhh.*" On the back was written: "*The best kept secret in Washington State. The Wahluke School District.*" They were being honored by Superintendent Bergesen for having exemplary programs, and now their success was is no longer a secret. This success was due, in large part, to the efforts of a dedicated group of 30 citizens determined to have a hometown high school.

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Professional opinion about small schools is changing. It is now widely recognized that, compared with larger schools, small schools are more productive and effective. Students make more rapid progress toward graduation, they are more satisfied, fewer drop out, and they behave better. All of these benefits are especially true for disadvantaged students.

Yet, in many rural parts of the country, public officials and professional educators continue to believe small schools are inefficient and ineffective. Rural communities have seen this way of thinking result in closed schools, angry residents, and long bus rides for many students.

Today, about a quarter of U.S. high schools remain small (i.e., with fewer than 400 students in grades 9-12). This book discusses the general status of small rural high schools in the United States and why we should care about them. It then takes a closer look at four particular schools—all located in communities of very modest means—that were nevertheless flourishing institutions. Discover the vision, worldview, and local initiative evident in these schools and their rural communities.

Small High Schools that Flourish provides guidance to administrators and policymakers who would like to keep their small high schools but must grapple with problems of funding, outmigration, personnel shortages, and curriculum standards and accountability. A detailed resource section provides links to helpful organizations and publications to aid educators and community members in maintaining and improving their small high schools.

Editors Craig B. Howley and Hobart L. Harmon, both well-known researchers and writers in rural education, have published dozens of articles on the topic. Dr. Howley is the director of the ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools; he coedited the popular companion volume to this book, *Sustainable Small Schools: A Handbook for Rural Communities*. Dr. Harmon is a state director (Virginia) at AEL, Inc. Other contributors to this volume include researchers from four of the nation's regional educational laboratories.

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